

Reviewer comment-1

This manuscript addresses a timely and important public health issue by examining the intersection of menopause, mental health, substance use, and racial health disparities among Black women. The paper highlights an understudied population and emphasizes the influence of structural inequities, including racism and sexism, on women's health outcomes. The integration of Critical Race Theory (CRT) provides an important perspective for understanding health disparities beyond biological explanations. This topic is highly relevant to researchers and practitioners in psychology, public health, women's health, social work, and health disparities research.

The title is engaging, descriptive, and accurately reflects the primary focus of the manuscript. Alternative title (optional): "The Unspoken Shift: Menopause, Mental Health, Substance Use, and Health Disparities Among Black Women" or "Menopause, Mental Health, and Substance Use Among Black Women: A Critical Race Theory Perspective"

The abstract effectively summarizes the purpose, major themes, and implications of the manuscript. However, it is somewhat lengthy and could be streamlined by reducing repetitive language. The authors may also wish to clarify earlier that this manuscript is a narrative review/commentary rather than an empirical investigation. Doing so would better align readers' expectations.

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However, numerous sentences are quite long and occasionally difficult to follow. Careful copyediting would improve readability by: · reducing sentence length; · eliminating repetitive wording; · improving transitions between paragraphs; · correcting several awkward phrases; · ensuring consistent terminology throughout the manuscript. **A professional editorial review would substantially improve the manuscript's overall flow.**

The manuscript is generally well organized and logically structured. The introduction clearly establishes the importance of menopause as a public health issue while appropriately narrowing the focus to Black women's experiences. The discussion of Critical Race Theory provides a meaningful conceptual lens for understanding structural inequities that shape menopausal experiences.

Comment [PW1]: The abstract was reduced to repetitive language, and commentary review replaced empirical investigation.

Comment [PW2]: The flow of the manuscript was completed with a thorough editing

The physiological and neurobiological sections provide an informative review of current literature; however, several opportunities exist to strengthen the manuscript. **First, the manuscript would benefit from clearer organization through additional subheadings that distinguish biological mechanisms, psychological outcomes, substance use, structural determinants, and clinical implications. Second, although the discussion of Critical Race Theory is compelling, the manuscript would be strengthened by explicitly linking the theoretical framework to each major section throughout the review rather than discussing CRT primarily in one section. Third, the review would benefit from a brief conceptual figure illustrating the proposed relationships among structural racism, menopause, mental health, substance use, healthcare access, and health outcomes. Finally, several sections could be condensed to reduce repetition while maintaining the manuscript's depth.**

Comment [PW3]: Subheadings were added as needed, and CRT was added throughout the manuscript & a conceptual figure was added to illustrate the relationship among structural racism, menopause mental health, substance use, healthcare access and outcomes. Sections were reviewed and condensed.

The manuscript cites numerous recent studies (2022–2025) while also incorporating foundational references where appropriate (e.g., Geronimus et al.; Ladson-Billings & Tate). Overall, the literature appears current and relevant. Suggestions: The authors may wish to incorporate additional literature on:

· menopause-related mental health disparities among Black women; · culturally responsive behavioral health interventions;

· resilience and protective factors among midlife Black women;

· implementation of culturally competent menopause care. Including these areas would provide a more balanced discussion by highlighting strengths and protective processes in addition to health disparities.

Comment [PW4]: Additional literature was reviewed and added

The manuscript addresses an important and timely topic, is grounded in relevant scholarship, and offers a valuable interdisciplinary perspective. The recommended revisions primarily concern organization, clarity, reduction of redundancy, and stronger integration of the conceptual framework throughout the manuscript rather than substantive deficiencies.

Reviewer comment-2

The topic is timely and of considerable importance. The intersection of menopause, behavioral health, and health disparities addresses a meaningful gap in practice and the literature. However, it would benefit from substantial revision to improve organization, streamline transitions, and strengthen synthesis.

The title is engaging, informative, and accurately reflects the primary focus of the manuscript. No revisions are recommended.

The abstract should be revised to conform to the Journal guidelines. Specifically, it exceeds the recommended level of detail, is not presented as a structured abstract (Summary, Findings, and Applications), and should be condensed to **the journal's 250-word limit**. While the abstract reflects the manuscript's scope, a more concise and structured presentation would improve readability and alignment with journal requirements.

Comment [PW5]: The abstract was condensed and edited.

The manuscript is generally well written and suitable for scholarly communication. However, a careful editorial review would improve clarity in several sections where awkward phrasing or occasionally complex sentence structure occasionally interrupts readability.

The manuscript addresses a broad range of interrelated topics relevant to menopause, behavioral health, and health disparities among Black women. While this interdisciplinary approach is a strength, the breadth of topics occasionally requires substantial transitions that reorient the reader to the central thesis. **Consider whether some sections could be more tightly integrated or streamlined to improve narrative flow, reduce unnecessary reorientation, and maintain focus on the manuscript's central contribution.**

Comment [PW6]: Some of the sections were reviewed and streamlined to improve the flow

The manuscript is well supported by a current and relevant body of literature. However, the reference list should undergo a comprehensive review for APA 7 compliance. Several journal articles are cited using publisher or abstract-page URLs despite having assigned DOIs. Where available, DOIs should be used in place of publisher URLs. Additionally, the reference list contains formatting inconsistencies and what appear to be internal research notes (e.g., "Source: ...pdf"), which should be removed prior to publication. A final audit of all references for accuracy, formatting, and consistency is recommended.

Comment [PW7]: The reference list was reviewed and edited with corrections in APA

This manuscript addresses an important, timely, and often underrepresented topic with clear relevance to social work, behavioral health, and health equity. The authors should be commended for bringing together literature from multiple disciplines to examine the complex

intersection of menopause, mental health, substance use, and health disparities among Black women. The manuscript has a strong scholarly foundation and the potential to make a meaningful contribution to the literature.

My recommendations are intended to strengthen an already promising manuscript. I encourage the authors to focus on organization and synthesis, ensuring that each section builds upon the previous one while maintaining a clear focus on the manuscript's central contribution. Revising the abstract to align with journal requirements, streamlining transitions between sections, and conducting a thorough editorial review of the reference list (including APA 7 formatting and DOI usage where applicable) would substantially improve the manuscript's readability and scholarly presentation. I believe these revisions are well within reach and would significantly enhance the manuscript's impact.

Comment [PW8]: The reference page was reviewed and improved to match APA 7 formatting