The Black Experience: Negligence in Mental Healthcare

Eden Agyeman, Rou Chen, Mehak Islam, Samin Jayaswal
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The Story of Amaranthia Sepia

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What is a Health Disparity?

A preventable difference in health outcomes that negatively affects disadvantaged populations.
How Does Psychology Affect Black Individuals?
Psychology

- Study of mental processes and how they affect human behavior
- Range from perception and thinking to mental health conditions
Mental Health Emergency Department Visits by Condition, 2021

Data Adapted from Health of Boston.gov

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mental Health Disorder</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>White</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety Disorders</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depressive Disorders</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bipolar Disorder</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Mental Health Services Received in Past Year Among U.S. Adults with Any Mental Illness (2021)

National Data from SAMHSA

How do Black Individuals Experience Psychology Today?

- Often overlooked
- Cultural biases and misunderstandings
- Lack of trust in healthcare system
- Lack of representation
The Lack of Black Mental Healthcare Professionals

- In 2021, **4%** of psychologists in the U.S. were Black
- In 2022, **8.7%** of the psychologists (Ph. D) were Black
- **2%** of psychiatrists were Black
- **7%** of marriage and family counselors were Black
- **11%** of professional counselors were Black
- **22%** of social workers were Black
75% of US medical schools shut down

The 2 of the 7 Black Medical Schools survived
- Howard University in D.C
- Meharry Medical College in Nashville
In his report, Flexner wrote that African-American physicians should be trained in "hygiene rather than surgery" and should primarily serve as "sanitarians," whose purpose was "protecting whites" from common diseases like tuberculosis. (Hlavinka, 2020)
WHAT IF THOSE MEDICAL SCHOOLS WERE NEVER SHUT DOWN?
Not sophisticated enough to develop mental health disorders

Then...

Began to create diagnoses to pathologize (“abnormal”) behavior they expected from enslaved people

Believed that only those with mental illnesses would want to escape slavery

Mental health awareness was never meant for Black people

1619–1865
SEGREGATION
1880s–1965

- Political uprisings by Black people during Jim Crow era
- “Aggressive” and “hostile” as DSM-II diagnostic criteria for schizophrenia
- Lobotomies were performed on Black children as young as 5 years old
Black Americans are 4x more likely to be diagnosed with Schizophrenia than White patients.

Data from the Massachusetts Association for Mental Health
Black individuals are 3x more likely to be killed by police during a mental health crisis.

Data according to the National Alliance on Mental Health.
According to Howard University, police killings of unarmed Black Americans are responsible for more than 50 million days of poor mental health among Black Americans, cumulatively.
At Howard University Hospital in one day, I had back-to-back suicide attempts... one a young mother, two males, all between 20 and 50 years old. I had never seen so many suicide attempts in such a short period.”

- Danielle Hairston

“Jaleel Brabham, a mental/behavioral health therapist... noticed an increase in the number of his Black clients who are ‘self-medicating with drugs.’”- NBC News
RESULTS OF THE MASSACHUSETTS YOUTH HEALTH SURVEY 2021 (MIDDLE SCHOOL)

Data from Mass.gov

- Injuring oneself intentionally
- Feeling hopeless for 2+ weeks
- Seriously considering suicide, past 30 days
- Using a vape product, past 30 days

Percentage of Massachusetts Youths

Race

White

Black

Percentage of Massachusetts Youths
How do we bridge these gaps?
TO BRIDGE THE GAPS:
1. Implement Black History into Educational Curriculum
2. Encourage Culturally Competent Care
3. Increase Accessibility
4. Prioritize Community
“In the African American community, we’ve been taught to tough it out, hide our suffering, but this is something none of us have ever experienced, and no one should suffer in silence.”

– Taraji P. Henson
Thank you!

Any questions or comments?
References

- Facts & figures. MAMH. (n.d.). https://www.mamh.org/science-innovation/facts-figures#:~:text=In%202020%20%2C%20around%2035%25%20of%20individuals%20with%20mental%20health%20conditions
- School counselor demographics and statistics [2024]: Number of school counselors in the US. Zippia. (2024, April 5). https://www.zippia.com/school-counselor-jobs/demographics/
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