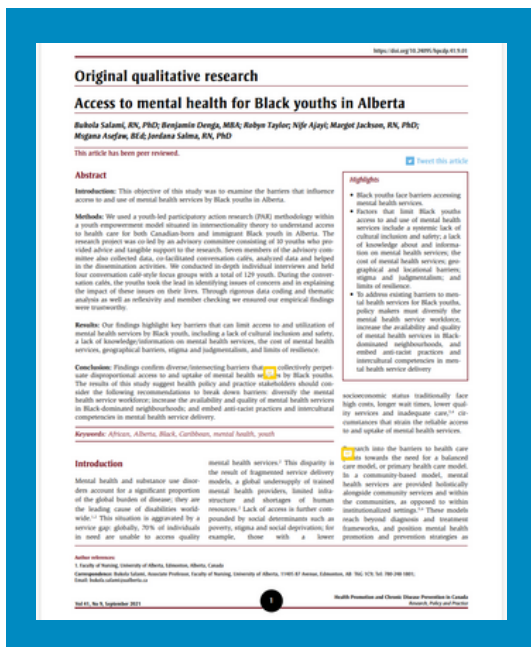


RESEARCH REVIEW

MENTAL HEALTH: A CONVERSATION MISSING BLACK YOUTH

BY: EANIMI AGUBE



This qualitative report, Access to Mental Health for Black Youths in Alberta (Salami et al.) is reviewed by Eanimi Agube and was published by Health Promotion and Chronic Disease Prevention in Canada.

The qualitative research report Access to mental health for Black youths in Alberta explores the issues with access to mental health services and the perception of mental health among the 129 Black-identifying youths between the age of 16 and 30 that participated in the study. Using the youth empowerment model and the participatory action research approach, the researchers collected data with the following themes;

- Lack of cultural safety and inclusion in service delivery
- Lack of knowledge/information on mental health services
- Geographical, economic and locational barriers
- Stigmatization and judgementalism with Black communities
- Limites of self-sufficiency in confronting mental health stressors

Mental health challenges and the undersupply of access to service deliveries continue to represent a significant portion of the burden of global diseases. This burden of service shortage, specifically for mental health challenges, is more defined in communities with lower socioeconomic statuses. Commonly represented communities are immigrant and refugee populations, racialized minorities and individuals that possess an intersection of these identities (Salami et al., 2021). This report highlights five barriers that deter the use and access to mental health services for Black youths in Alberta.

Lack of cultural safety and inclusion in service delivery

The research participants noted that the standardized population of White mental health service providers contributed to the sense of exclusion they experienced, stating that the

service providers "lacked intercultural training and understanding of the complexities of ethnicity." (Salami et al., 2021)

Lack of knowledge/information on mental health services

The research participants noted that due to a lack of knowledge, they normalized the signs of mental health challenges because of an inability to describe and code the symptoms. They also note a lack of awareness of service providers and helpful resources to access.

Geographical, economic and locational barriers

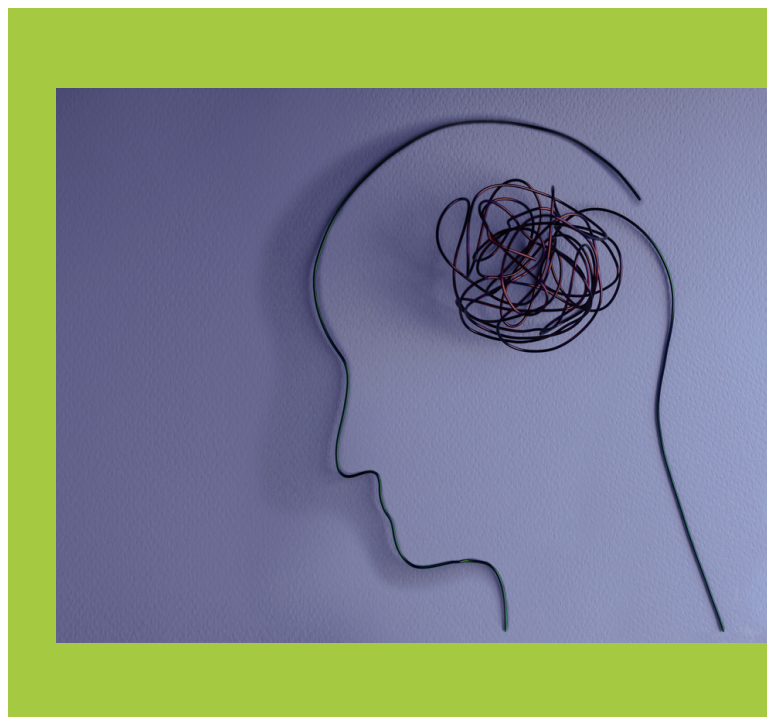
Amongst the issues is the need for more service providers within their communities and the added burden of needing to devote extra resources to commute to service providers. Another barrier mentioned is the cost of the services. The participants expressed the struggles of different economic responsibilities and access to mental health services contribute to the strained financial duties.

Stigmatization and judgementalism with Black communities

Issues with a lack of awareness of mental health in communities contribute to the lack of willingness to access mental health services. The research participants note various negative connotations around mental health, including the views that mental health challenges are a sign of weakness and hold less importance than physical health.

Limits of self-sufficiency in confronting mental health stressors

Generational trauma and perceptions of strength influence the way the participants address mental health stressors, as other members advise them of the community to get over the stressors. Creating



mechanisms centred around trying to be more resilient and robust, regardless of the mental health challenges.

Discussion

In the report, the researchers discuss the various themes developed from the research, giving an overview of the barriers that affect Black youth's access to mental health services. As stated in the report, the researchers noted that, to their knowledge, no research had been done on how access to mental health services affects Black youths. This research is a gateway to addressing the need for a conversation about mental health that includes Black youth communities. The limitations of this research are highlighted in the report, including concerns about gender representation. The research question is: *What are the barriers and facilitators to access and use mental health services for Black youths in Alberta?* Of curiosity, what was the socioeconomic difference for the Black Albertan youths represented in the study, were most university students or from different works of life? It would be good to know if the data collection setting limits participants' representation also if

the data collection setting affected how the participants interacted with the research question.

As a Black youth community member, I believe that the research highlights barriers that prevent access to mental health services. The researchers note ways to strengthen further the research with knowledge of specific barriers stemming from the community. More action should be taken around access to mental health in communities, especially among Black youths. This study shows evidence of generational trauma that is passed and carried on. As part of their recommendations to address the barriers, the researchers note that it is insufficient to provide solutions to the surface problems. There need to be actions addressing the systemic and structural failures in how social services interact with members of racialized communities. Overall the report does an excellent job as a stepping stone and a contribution to making room for Black youth in conversations that affect their everyday lives and mental health.

Eanimi Agube's interest in working to understand better ways to empower communities and learn more about the challenges faced by marginalized communities has led her to complete her Master's degree in Community and Regional Planning. In her spare time, she is an avid podcast listener, an aspiring adventurer and an animal lover.

REFERENCES

Salami, B., Denga, B., Taylor, R., Ajayi, N., Jackson, M., Asefaw, M., Salma, J.. (2021). Access to mental health for Black youths in Alberta. Health Promotion and Chronic Disease Prevention in Canada. 41. 245–253. <https://doi.org/10.24095/hpcdp.41.9.01>

