

Mental Health Awareness in Black and African American College Students that attend HBCUs and PWIs

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Introduction

Abstract

Black students may face a number of adversities before attending college and while in college. Black students take on different perspectives of collegiate experiences that could either affect their mental health or bring out more awareness to their mental health and the importance of tending to its needs. Despite the privileges one student may have over the other, African American students face stigmas that affect the awareness of their mental health, in addition to knowing what resources they have access to beyond the support they may have from family or peers. Many African Americans avoid accessing formal mental health resources because these services may be seen as unfamiliar or meant for use by “crazy people” (Wallace & Constantine, 2005).

Aims of the Research

The purpose of this study is to (a) determine what kinds of psychological distressors Black students experience while attending an HBCU or PWI (predominately white institution) and (b) to understand how the institution type may shape Black students' experiences of mental health awareness. The study has not been implemented yet, so I discuss the proposed study and recommendations for helping Black students based on the literature to date.

Research Questions

1. What challenges do African American college students encounter while attending HBCUs and PWIs?
2. What experiences would influence Black students to seek mental health services?
3. What access or information do black students have at their institution (i.e., HBCU or PWI) that promote mental health awareness?

Method

Research Design

I plan to use the phenomenology approach to focus on the study of an individual's lived experiences within the world through interviews and observations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The goals of this study are intended to be understood in context of the students' perspectives and experiences of how their institution type has shaped their mental health awareness. This will be accomplished by observing the students' social phenomena that may influence their mental health awareness or hinder them knowing healthier ways of dealing with their threats to their mental health (distressors).

Participants

I will interview 20 Black students that attend Florida A&M University and Florida State University, therefore accessing 10 students from each institution. The choice of students that are being used will help identify the perspectives of the Black students' influences of mental health awareness from both institutions. The age ranges from 18-25 years old.

Data Collection and Analysis

All interview data will be audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Then, we (the PI team along with the graduate students and the postdoctoral research associate) will iteratively follow the well-established (Braun & Clarke, 2019) phases of thematic analysis, which include (1) data familiarization, (2) generating code, (3) constructing themes, (4) reviewing themes, and (5) defining themes. After each interview, we will document initial reflections. A summary will be written of each codable instance. Codes will be developed that closely match the words and statements of participants. When multiple related codes are identified, these codes will be grouped into major themes.

Results

Recommendations

The researcher suggested recommendations to help support the awareness of Mental health at different Universities. More culturally responsive and competent mental health counselors are needed to help Black college students. Also, colleges and universities should increase the number of Black mental health counselors so more students will have access. Moreover, mental health services must be more accessible by creating more college and university wide announcements of the available times to have access to the health services center and extend hours for individuals whose schedule may not align with traditional business hours. Finally, clinicians should provide a wellness toolbox to help students continually receive support outside of the counseling center..

Conclusion

Mental health is important for Black college students because there are more than just a couple of stressors that come along during their young adult years. Depending on the students' background and family stigmas, their approach to dealing with their mental health are different. Some students deal with racism, microaggressions, academic expectations, financial hinderance, lack of family support, depression, anxiety, and suicide. It is imperative that Black students are made aware of help-seeking attitudes, access to health services and therapeutic interventions. African Americans historically have been taught to underutilize formal mental health services (Wallace & Constantine, 2005).

Key References

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