



In Canada, the mental health of Black men is significantly impacted by systemic inequalities, enduring cultural biases, and historical burdens. This factsheet serves as a direct call to action to dismantle these barriers and forge a mental health landscape where inclusivity, accessibility, and fairness are paramount.

Our examination identifies the hurdles that Black communities face in seeking mental health care and highlights effective strategies to remove these stigmas. It emphasizes the need for transformative change, aiming to create an environment where Black men are not just surviving but thriving, with access to the support and care they deserve.

SYSTEMIC INEQUITIES

Black Canadians, more often faced with unemployment and lower average incomes, often struggle to access a broader range of mental health services available to those with private payment or employer-covered insurance. This economic barrier, combined with prolonged wait times and a reliance on drop-in clinics due to limited access to family physicians, underscores significant challenges in accessing mental health care. Particularly in Ontario, Black individuals, notably of Caribbean descent, face longer wait times for mental health services, double that of white patients. These factors collectively highlight the urgent need for more accessible and equitable mental health care solutions for Black communities in Canada.

MASCULINE NORMS

Black masculinity norms, deeply influencing the mental health of Black men, stem from cultural perceptions of masculinity that stress hypermasculinity and resilience against adversity. These norms prioritize overt strength and emotional restraint, posing significant challenges for Black men in terms of expressing vulnerability and seeking mental health support. Research, including one highlighted in the 2016 issue of Behavioral Medicine, underscores how these norms amplify mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and PTSD. Additionally, they impede access to vital mental health services by creating a conflict where seeking help contradicts the expected masculine identity, which often revolves around enduring adversity without external support and adhering to a stoic demeanor.

THE IMPACT OF STIGMA

Stigma, both from within and externally, can significantly hinder discussions and aid-seeking for mental health issues. An Ottawa Public Health study found that 66% of respondents feared judgment for mental illness, leading to hidden or ignored mental health problems. Additionally, 40% viewed seeking mental health treatment as personal failure, often feeling shame and embarrassment. This perception, particularly strong in Black communities due to cultural and societal pressures, discourages individuals from seeking necessary help, perpetuating a cycle of silence and suffering.

LACK OF REPRESENTATION

Black individuals in Canada often encounter prejudice and discrimination within the healthcare system, which can erode trust. The scarcity of Black mental health professionals and culturally sensitive care exacerbates this problem, making it difficult for Black individuals to access relatable assistance. A [study](#) conducted by the Mental Health Commission of Canada in 2018 revealed that 60% of Black Canadians would be more inclined to utilize mental health services if their mental health provider shared their racial background. Furthermore, research from 2016 indicates that Black physicians make up approximately 2.3% of the physician population in Ontario, compared to 4.3% of the population. This underrepresentation in the medical field implies that many general practitioners may lack the cultural competence needed to effectively serve their Black patients.

STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING MENTAL HEALTH AMONG BLACK MEN

Destigmatizing Mental Health: Promoting conversations that challenge societal norms and stereotypes is crucial. This means encouraging open discussions about mental health within the Black community, including among Black men. By educating individuals about mental health and making therapy a more common and accepted practice, we can inspire Black men to prioritize their mental well-being. This can involve community events, workshops, and educational initiatives that provide information and resources to help individuals better understand mental health.

Building Support Networks: Establishing strong support networks through community involvement and access to culturally competent mental health professionals is vital. Black men should have access to mental health providers who understand their unique experiences and cultural backgrounds. Creating spaces where Black men can connect, share their stories, and receive guidance from peers who have faced similar challenges can also be instrumental in building these support networks.

Embracing Emotional Strength and Resilience: Redefining strength to include vulnerability and celebrating the resilience that comes from navigating adversity can help reshape societal expectations. By acknowledging that seeking help and expressing one's emotions are acts of courage and strength, we can encourage Black men to be more open about their mental health struggles. Celebrating their resilience in the face of systemic and societal challenges can also help destigmatize mental health concerns.

Breaking Stereotypes and Challenging Stigmas: Challenging stereotypes and stigmas surrounding Black men's mental health is essential for progress. This involves addressing harmful stereotypes that suggest that Black men should always appear strong and unaffected by emotional issues. It also means challenging the misconception that mental health problems are a sign of weakness. Through education and advocacy, we can work to dispel these damaging stereotypes and create a more inclusive and empathetic society.

SOURCES

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