


Chapter 9

Unmasking Black Men's Mental Health: The Impact of Social Determinants

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ABSTRACT

This chapter illuminates a critical, often overlooked aspect of mental health, social determinants affecting Black men. While mental health is a universal concern, the unique experiences and challenges of Black men require specific attention. The authors dissect the complex web of social determinants shaping Black men's mental health, including historical legacies of racism and discrimination, intersectionality, and structural factors like healthcare access, education, employment, and housing. Cultural influences and family dynamics are explored alongside the resilience within Black communities. This chapter confronts the stigma surrounding mental health in Black communities and addresses multifaceted barriers to care. It showcases community-based interventions and effective, culturally sensitive, mental health promotion models while discussing policy recommendations and advocacy for equitable mental health outcomes.

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Mental health, particularly the impact of social determinants on Black men's mental well-being, is critically underexplored. Historical injustices like slavery, segregation, and systemic racism continue to influence Black men's mental health (Alegría et al., 2018; Pester et al., 2023). Recent data reveal a 30% increase in suicide rates among Black people from 2014 to 2019, with only a small fraction of Black men seeking mental health care, preferring providers of the same race. This highlights the importance of cultural competence in mental health services. However, Black mental health professionals make up less than 5% of the field, presenting a significant barrier to accessing culturally resonant care.

Economic factors and trust issues also hinder the use of mental health treatments among Black and Hispanic men, compared to their white counterparts, reflecting broader accessibility and stigma issues within Black communities (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023). The profound effect of mental health on life quality underscores the need for addressing these disparities. By examining the social determinants and historical context, targeted interventions can improve mental health care accessibility and effectiveness for all races (Alegría et al., 2018; Alvarez, 2018; Pester et al., 2023).

NAVIGATING THE LEGACY OF HISTORICAL TRAUMA AND CULTIVATING RESILIENCE

The mental health landscape for Black men in the United States is profoundly affected by a history of racism, discrimination, and systemic oppression, including the traumatic legacies of slavery, Jim Crow laws, and violent racial terrorism (Hankerson & Bailey, 2015; Williams et al., 2019). Slavery's brutality, coupled with post-emancipation challenges like segregation and lynching, inflicted lasting psychological trauma. Subsequent eras, including the Great Migration and the Civil Rights Movement, introduced new stressors such as urban poverty and the mental toll of activism, despite leading to social and legal advances (Shim & Compton, 2020).

The War on Drugs further exacerbated these issues, leading to mass incarceration of Black men, resulting in family separations, stigma, and dire mental health impacts (Cohen et al., 2022). Modern instances of police brutality and racial violence, exemplified by the high-profile cases of Rodney King, Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and George Floyd, have perpetuated collective trauma and underscored persistent racial injustices, adding to the mental health challenges faced by Black communities (Isome, 2022; Maiden et al., 2021).

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