

Mental Health Literacy: Increasing stress and anxiety management in African American adolescents to reduce school to prison pipeline

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Abstract

The growing disparities of adequate mental health information and resources within the public secondary school system has contributed to a rising inequality of more students facing disciplinary action than those who finish their secondary school education without any disciplinary infractions. Previous research has shown a positive correlation of healthy coping mechanisms and teaching students how to appropriately recognize struggles with mental health regarding stress and anxiety to reduce future infractions. By utilizing data from previous articles in the psychiatric field, we can see the early effect of introducing mental health literacy and how previous works can be successful. By focusing on the early intervention of mental health literacy in Chicago Public schools we can help reduce the school to prison pipeline of large urban populations. In many intercity regions across the US there is a gap for Black students in their ability to finish secondary education without any disciplinary infractions. I believe by researching and offering early intervention solutions we can help close that gap and increase Black students' secondary graduation rate.

Background

Mental health literacy is a subcategory of health literacy which is well researched as a part of overall health and wellness in the US. According to the institute of medicine, introducing patients to health literacy causes patients to have autonomy in their care and further explain the best possible choices they can make for their personal care. Similarly, mental health literacy also provides people with adequate mental health information and resources to make educated decisions. While mental health literacy focuses a large range of mental health disorders, this proposal focuses mainly on stress and anxiety. Stress and anxiety are prevalent in adolescents as they are learning to deal with school, extracurricular, social life, and a developing home life. A lack of knowledge about how to appropriately handle and identify mental health emotions can cause young adolescents to act out. This ultimately leads to harsh consequences and a ripple effect on their choices and discipline in school as they progress. These discipline infractions cause a rise in the school to prison pipeline further deeming predominantly children of color as disruptive and punishable.

Literature Review

Many findings have identified a low amount of mental health literacy regarding psychological disorders and professional services regarding young adults. The research highlights the need for increasing mental health literacy, decreasing stigmas, and changing

negative attitudes around reaching out to local professional services. Another point that was highlighted regarding mental health literacy is how education around mental health is different among people of different racial and gender demographics. African Americans have been found to have a lower amount of mental health literacy regarding attitude and psychological disorders and women having a higher amount of mental health literacy compared to men. Another finding identifies the importance of diversifying mental health literacy among different racial groups, cultures, sexualities, etc. Background suggests a different perspective of how psychology might overlook people who are not able to fully comprehend mental disorders and the stigma attached to mental disorders. While research suggests there are certain attitudes and perspectives within the Black community which may affect perspectives around mental health care by targeting adolescents, we can help tap an overlooked demographic. Further research suggests, focusing on ways to help children successfully manage their anxiety and build resilience so that they can may lead to successful high school graduation and lower chances of becoming incarcerated. This research study focuses on providing children early on with healthy coping strategies and creating school-based intervention so that their anxiety is understood and mediated.

Gaps

While researching mental health literacy there tends to be a generalized focus on sharing mental health literacy to an older age group who may have preconceived notions about mental health. While I believe there is an important value for educating older populations, I recognize a gap between adequate literacy and people of various race and ethnicity.

Statement of Purpose/ Argument

Many findings have identified a low amount of mental health literacy regarding psychological disorders and professional services for young adults. (Hadjimina, E; Furnham, A. 2017). The research highlights the need for increasing mental health literacy, decreasing stigmas, and managing negative attitudes around reaching out to local professional services. (Cheng, H.L 2018). The importance of providing mental health literacy in schools would look like professionals such as social workers, licensed therapists in schools, and provided alternative methods when a student may significantly act out. Also, weekly simplistic group gatherings in class to discuss anxiety, stress (school, homelife) for about 30 mins. These weekly meetings will teach students to learn how to properly identify and manage their anxiety and stress. Identifying feelings of anxiety and stress can help student figure out how to feel and act appropriately and make healthy choices based upon their feelings. Appropriate problem solving can help limit distractions and disruptions in the classroom. A lack of disruptiveness in the class cause for a lower number of disciplinary infractions which contribute to the school to prison pipeline. Instead, students are now supported and uplifted within the classroom which causes the classroom to be a positive and productive learning environment. Students are more focused and engaged within the classroom

Methods

I will be utilizing Correlation Research to conduct my research. I will take a measurement of disciplinary action at each quarter and yearly disciplinary action report by grade level. Disciplinary infractions would include in school suspensions, expulsions, out-of -school suspensions, detentions, write-ups, and warnings. Within the students, 1st year we will measure whether the disciplinary infractions increase, decrease, or offer no change from the previous

year. Based on that information presented from the previous year, researchers will be able to find adequate information regarding stress, anxiety, and coping habits implemented in the classroom.

Expected Results

I expect to see an increase in identification of appropriate mental health topics related to students, a decrease in the amount disciplinary infractions regarding adolescent black students, increase the number of students who feel confident and secure in the school system, an increase in the graduation rate among black students, and an increase of classroom productivity and readiness.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there should be an increased importance of diversifying mental health literacy among different racial groups, cultures, sexualities, etc (Gaylord- Harden, 2009). Furthermore, adequate mental health literacy can help children successfully manage their anxiety and build resilience so that they can successfully graduate high school and lower their chances of being incarcerated (Holder, S. 2019). Through an increased focus on children of color as they navigate through the classroom, there should be resources available for students of color to succeed in the classroom.

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