

HOW CULTURAL DIVERSITY IMPACTS MENTAL HEALTH

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"Diversity has made our Nation a more vibrant and open society, ablaze in ideas, perspectives, and innovations."(Office of the Surgeon General). Over the past three decades, the portion of students born into immigrant families increased from 6% to 20 % (Georgiades). Likewise, the amount of teenagers who perceive anxiety and depression as significant problems amongst their peers has risen to 70% (Pew Research Center). This issue raises the question of how racial diversity in American communities affects the mental health of individuals. The careful examination of evidence from sources such as the National Center for Biotechnology Information and Counseling Today concludes that there are three fundamental answers to the question of racial diversity's impact on an individual's mental health. Solutions encompass that racial diversity impacts individuals' mental health in either a positive or a negative manner. However, opponents of this argument, such as former Surgeon General David Satcher, claim that racial diversity has no profound relationship with an individual's mental health.

The first thought that comes to mind when determining the connection between a community's diversity and the mental health of its members is that the connection is apparent, and has positive consequences. A journal written by authors Katholiki Georgiades, Michael H. Boyle, and Kelly A. Fife of the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Neurosciences at McMaster University proves this claim. The journal, published in 2013, put forth that research studies have recorded the mental and emotional benefits of attending diverse educational establishments (Georgiades). One example of this was the correlation between first-generation immigrant youth and improved mental health, proving that racial diversity has a primarily

positive impact on students in a community (Georgiades). In agreement with this statement is the U.S. Newswire, which claims that the culture of medical providers can affect how patients are rehabilitated or even diagnosed ("Culture Counts in Mental Health Services and Research Finds New Surgeon General Report."). In addition to impacting the mental health of students and patients, diversity in communities contributes to the perceptions of the mentally ill. This statement proves especially true in a study done by the Health and Human Services Department in conjunction with the National Institute of Mental Health. According to this study, Caucasians in the general vicinity of Los Angeles were apt to deem those with schizophrenia as "crazy" and untreatable, but those of Mexican descent were more likely to view the same people as helpless and sick (Sociocultural and Environmental Processes). This evidence demonstrates that racial diversity has a profound impact on the way members of the population view each other, thereby changing perceptions of self-worth and affect mental disorders. As shown in this study, such diversity improves perceptions of mental health, which serves to reduce the stigmas and negative stereotypes associated with mental disorders such as anxiety and depression. Furthermore, these pieces of evidence support that racial diversity has a positive impact on mental health in schools, medical institutions, and communities. Additionally, racial diversity also helps to reduce mental disorders by fostering acceptance, an essential trait in today's diversifying America.

Regardless of the overwhelming amount of evidence presented, other researches take a different stance on the topic. These researchers, such as those at the University Wire, claim that due to unfavorable American opinion on immigration and racial stereotypes, minorities in the country receive significantly lower amounts of mental health care "Letter to the Editor: At USC, Mental Health is Key to Diversity." This statement is further established by author Mary

Morrissey, who not only holds a master's degree in counseling psychology but also has four decades of experience as a psychological consultant (Morrissey). In one of her articles, titled "The Invisible Minority: Counseling Asian Americans," Morrissey champions that due to the "Model Minority Myth," an immense amount of mental disorders in the Asian-American community go undiagnosed and untreated. The "Model Minority Myth" is essentially a stereotype of Asian Americans which draws upon the apparent success stories of a privileged few, and claims that the entire Asian-American community must follow this status-quo. Consequently, this stereotype has a detrimental impact on the Asian American population and can cause mental health problems such as feelings of weakness, malice, loneliness, and victimization. All of these emotions contribute to constant mental and emotional pressure, making the Asian American community more susceptible to mental illness (Morrissey).

In addition to stereotypes, language barriers also pose a threat to mental health, especially in the Hispanic community, where increasing diversity does not necessarily mean a more educated populace. According to the 1991 Surgeon General Report, nearly 40 percent of Hispanic descendants in America claim not to be proficient in English ("Culture Counts in Mental Health Services and Research Finds New Surgeon General Report."). After taking into account that only a limited amount of mental health care professionals can fluently speak Spanish, it is of no surprise that most Hispanic Americans struggle to find providers that fit their cultural needs. Although America is gradually diversifying, this racial diversity persists in mainly urban areas, which epidemiological studies have found to correlate with a higher risk for schizophrenia ("Culture Counts in Mental Health Services and Research Finds New Surgeon General Report."). Therefore, because minorities are more likely to live in these areas, they are at

a higher risk of developing a mental disorder. As said by counselors Mary Morrissey and Dr. Oliver Gruebner, racial diversity can negatively affect the mental health of minorities, such as the Asian American, Hispanic, and urban communities.

However there is yet another perspective about the complex issue of diversity, one that is taken by former Surgeon General David Satcher himself. In his 2001 report on mental health, Satcher claimed that "The cumulative weight and interplay of all of these barriers, not any single one alone, is likely responsible for mental health disparities" (Office of the Surgeon General). This evidence indicates that such barriers to mental health function at different times and in different ways for different people (Office of the Surgeon General). Furthermore, it also suggests that it is the behavior, not the culture, of medical providers that leaves an impact on the patient ("Culture Counts in Mental Health Services and Research Finds New Surgeon General Report."). In the same manner, diversity, especially racial diversity, cannot have a significant impact on students in a particular community. This reasoning indicates that a lack of initiative in schools to promote student's mental health is the actual cause of youth mental illness. Moreover, a lack of preventative efforts and degrading structure in schools, not racial diversity, causes mental illness in students. Finally, environment, circumstances, and beliefs impact mental health, because it has been proven that diversity in schools, medical institutions, and communities does not ("Culture Counts in Mental Health Services and Research Finds New Surgeon General Report."). Knowing the root cause of mental disorders is critical to understand, as it is crucial to treat and prevent them.

Of course, obstructions are always present on the path to a solution, and these may include bias in research sources and methods, and inaccurate diagnoses and predictions. Looking

past this, it is made clear that diversity has created a stronger America, one that is flourishing with new ideas and outlooks (Office of the Surgeon General). This statement is especially true as the portion of youth that identifies with a racial minority has nearly doubled, to over 40% of the public school populace. Nevertheless, this positivity is questionable, as the number of people with a diagnosable mental illness has also increased to 20% (Office of the Surgeon General). Mental disorders can have severe implications on a patient's education, health, and wellness. Additionally, this begs the question, how does racial diversity within a community determine the probability of individuals developing mental disorders? The answers include that racial diversity impacts individuals' mental health in either a positive or a negative manner. Opponents of this argument, however, claim that racial diversity has no profound relationship with an individual's mental health.

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