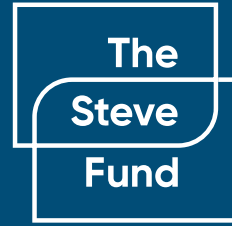# Mental Health Support for Black Families: Panel Discussion

Presenter: Faith Wilkins

Agenda

- Introduction

    - Panel discussion objective

    - Description of presentation format

    - Panelist introductions

- Grant overview

- Literature review overview

- Presentation and panelist questions

- Q&A

Grant Overview

Stakeholders: The Child Mind Institute has partnered with the Steve Fund to conduct this study. Our work has been made possible by the Morgan Stanley Alliance for Children's Mental Health.

Study Objective: To understand the core issues faced by Black families and young adults struggling to access mental health care and identify the types of resources and engagement vehicles needed to meet their needs.

Participants: Black families and youth, including those who identify as Black/African American, Afro-Latino, Afro-Caribbean, African immigrants, and other members of the African diaspora within the United States.

Grant Overview

Deliverables

- Literature review

- Nationally representative survey

- 3 articles for the Family Resource Center

- Final report

- Second panel discussion (Spring 2025)

- Steve Fund Projects:

  - Ask the Expert

  - Skill-Building Workshops

  - Featured Speakers Series

1,500 participants

Nationally representative survey includes 1,000 parents and 500 young adults (17-24)

Literature Review

Author: Debbie Cohen

- Focused exclusively on academic/peer-reviewed literature

- Limited to research published within the last five years (2019-present)

- After an initial review of more than 130 research papers, 48 included

- Key Topics:

  - Systemic Barriers

  - Culture/Family

  - Mental Health Care System

  - Intervention Initiatives

Systemic Barriers

Cost of Treatment

When asked to identify barriers to care, many Black families and youth listed treatment affordability as a main source of concern.

- Parents expressed the need to focus on more immediate concerns, such as **ensuring they have a place to live**, rather than their child's mental health

- Mothers indicated that they were "worried that professional services would be too expensive"

- In a recent survey of U.S. college students, Black students reported that financial concerns kept them from seeking care

Insurance

Studies found that the following insurance-related issues often led to delays in treatment.

- Not having insurance

- Available mental health care providers being out of network

- Available mental health care providers not accepting Medicaid

- Medicaid providing inadequate funds to cover mental health care needs

Logistical Issues

In several studies, families reported logistical issues as a hindrance to receiving care, including:

- Lack of transportation (including far proximity to public transportation)

- Inconvenient appointment times at mental health care facilities

- Long wait times for scheduling appointments

- No access to childcare

- Lack of information about:

  - Mental health disorders

  - Available treatments

  - How to access mental health services

Panelist Questions

Mental Health Care System

Racial Bias/Discrimination

Research found racial bias and discrimination to be a significant barrier to care.

- In one study, Black patients were significantly less likely to get an appointment than their white counterparts at the same mental health care centers

- In several studies, Black parents and youth reported negative past experiences & discrimination as a reason for avoiding mental health care services

- A study of school-based clinicians found **stereotypes** such as "delinquency/rule-breaking" and "anger/aggression" **more likely to be attributed to Black students, resulting in poor treatment and potential misdiagnosis**

Deficit in Cultural Understanding

Several studies found lack of cultural understanding among providers as a hinderance to treatment.

Black parents reported that:

- **Their input was not valued by clinicians**

- Aspects of their child's care, such as use of medications, were not explained

- Behavior management and strength assessment was not explained or included in treatment

Deficit in Cultural Understanding

Child and adolescent psychiatrists faced with **a growing population of African immigrants and refugees** noted challenges in effectively explaining diagnoses and treatment due to:

- **Lack of understanding of cultural differences and cultural family practices**

- Lack of available interpreters

- Visual summaries only being offered in English

Focus groups found that Black college students were apprehensive about seeking mental health care services if Black providers weren't available.

Differences in Diagnoses & Treatment

Research found that Black parents were more likely to report unsatisfactory quality of diagnosis and treatment for their children as compared to white and non-Black parents.

- Black children with ADHD were reported to be significantly less likely to receive medication than their white counterparts

- Scientists note that since a large portion of studies on mental health have included mainly white participants, **risk factors and symptoms specific to Black children are more likely to be overlooked**

- When compared to white children, Black children were more likely to receive diagnoses for externalizing disorders (e.g., ODD, ADHD) and less likely to be diagnosed with mood disorders (e.g., anxiety, depression)

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Panelist Questions

Culture & Family

Religion & Spirituality

Religion and spirituality are known to be a significant part of Black culture. And research has recognized they can be both a deterrent and an incentive for accessing mental health care.

Religion is considered a **barrier** to care when:

- Rigid ideals within the religious community keep parents and youth from seeking care

- Caregivers turn to prayer or spirituality to cope with emotional distress instead of seeking professional help for their family or child

Religion is considered a **facilitator** of care when:

- Religious communities and religious beliefs include support for efforts to seek and engage in mental health services

- Mental health providers work with religious organizations to increase access to care and awareness of services

Self-Reliance

Self-reliance is embedded deep within Black culture, a protective act of resistance against centuries of enduring white supremacy and systemic racial discrimination

But in terms of mental health care, it may be having a negative impact on Black youth, specifically young Black men.

- Studies involving Black college students found **higher percentages of young Black men opting out of mental health care**, believing that they could handle it on their own

- Participants who chose to handle their mental health on their own were significantly less likely to benefit from the mental health resources on campus but displayed higher rates of mental health challenges

Family Stigma

In several studies, Black parents and youth mentioned stigma as a reason for avoiding mental health care services

- When compared to white and non-Black adolescents, Black youth were more likely to hide their internalized mental health challenges from their parents

- Black youth listed lack of support from their family as an issue when attempting to access care

- **Black caregivers considered less formal mental health services, such as mentoring programs, as less stigmatizing**

Panelist Questions

Intervention Initiatives

Considering Trauma Caused by Racial Discrimination

Several studies highlighted the significant psychological toll that exposure to racial discrimination has on Black youth.

- **By early adolescence** (ages 10-14 years), **Black youth have already experienced discrimination and racially charged encounters** in several different environments

- Black high school students in high-achieving settings report self-doubt regarding their academic ability and sense of belonging when experiencing discrimination at school

- **Different populations within the Black community**, such as African American and Afro-Caribbean adolescents, **may have different trauma responses to racial discrimination**

Family-Centered Intervention

Research found strong family relationships to be a very important factor in the mental health support of Black youth

Mental health care providers can improve quality of care by:

- **Informing parents about mental health disorders and treatment options**

- Addressing parents' fears around provider coercion and involuntary hospitalization

- Including the entire family in therapy sessions

Adapting to Culture

Several studies emphasized the importance of culturally adapting interventions for Black patients.

- Possible intervention strategies targeting Black youth include:

  - **Incorporating culturally relevant risk factors, values, and traditions**

  - Incorporating culturally relevant examples, scenarios, and stories

  - **Using culturally informed assessment measures in evaluation**

  - Using culturally appropriate and syntonic language

  - Incorporating culturally informed therapeutic relationship techniques

  - Involving family in the intervention

  - **Employing more Black/African American mental healthcare providers**

  - **Training faculty members and campus staff on cultural issues**

Panelist Questions

Limitations

Literature Review Limitations

- The studies included in this analysis varied in size, with some including fewer than 20 participants. Studies with larger population sizes are needed

- This review was limited to peer reviewed research published within the last five years (2019-present)

- More information on the preferences and experiences of Black families with telehealth/teletherapy might show important considerations

- Several studies focused specifically on the perspectives and behavior of Black male youth/young adults. Less focused on other genders.

- More studies that acknowledge the heterogeneity of the Black community can provide more insight on the mental health needs of Black families

Questions?

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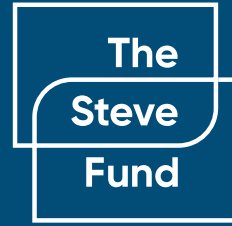
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