BELIEFS ABOUT SOCIAL WORKERS AMONG BLACK MALES

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BELIEFS ABOUT SOCIAL WORKERS AMONG BLACK MALES

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Social Work

by
Tavon Antonio Harris
June 18, 2016
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Approved by:

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ABSTRACT

It’s been more than a decade since the National Institute of Mental Health (NAMI) initiated its public campaign, ‘Real Men Real Depression.’ Despite increased awareness, research and relevant studies indicate that African American / Black men continue to underutilize mental health treatment while still having the highest all-cause mortality rates of any racial/ethnic group in the United States. When reading this statement, one must question what impact that the beliefs about ‘social workers’ through the lens of Black males in the United States, may play. This very simply, yet flammable, question not only seems pertinent but also seems to warrant further exploration due to the research that shows that service access and help-seeking by African-American males across the lifespan is significantly lower than that of their non-Black counterparts. That same research seems to make assumptions about why this is, however it is only responsible and ethical, given the National Association of Social workers’ (NASW) Code of Ethics calling for cultural competence in practice, that we challenge and test the rationales being offered.

This study was exploratory in nature, employed a snowball sampling methodology, and utilized an electronic survey offered through social media and promoted by word of mouth, targeting Black males over the age of 18, to assess their overall knowledge about being a social worker, and their beliefs and perceptions about social workers and how they believe social workers perceive them. The goal of this study was to begin to explore the reasons for
overwhelming statistics that speak to the fact that Black males do not access mental health services, especially those provided by social workers. A total of 59 were started, and 43 completed, by the target respondents, which included a 5-item scale, to assess basic knowledge about social workers, a 10-item scale to assess the general beliefs about social workers, and 13-item scale to assess the beliefs about the perceptions of social workers about Black males. Univariate and bivariate analyses were performed using SPSS, and the results revealed that although there was a moderate level of general knowledge about social workers, the general belief of the respondents were primarily negative, with their beliefs about how social workers see Black males was just slightly more positive. These results seemed to be across the board and were not shown to be correlated with level of education, income, or whether they has received direct services provided by social workers or had no affiliation with such services. What did seem to have some relevance was an overall negative belief about social workers, and a level of suspicion and distrust for how their information would be used, as evidenced by 16 respondents who started the survey but would not completed it.

In keeping with the NASW Code of Ethics, recommendation are provided to helps clinicians and those social workers providing direct service, be informed of the suspicions and apprehensions among this population, while encouraging the importance of continuous learning and increasing of cultural competence,
awareness and humility. Lastly, recommendations for future research are also provided for the same purposes.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

“A decade has passed since the National Institute of Mental Health initiated its landmark Real Men Real Depression public education campaign. Despite increased awareness, depressed African American men continue to underutilize mental health treatment and have the highest all-cause mortality rates of any racial/ethnic group in the United States” (Hankerson, Suite, & Bailey, 2015, p. 21). When reading this statement, one must question what impact that the beliefs about ‘social workers’ through the lens of Black males in the United States, may play. This very simply, yet flammable, question not only seems pertinent but also seems to warrant further exploration due to the research that shows that service access and help-seeking by African-American males across the lifespan is significantly lower than that of their non-Black counterparts. That same research seems to make assumptions about why this is, however it is only responsible and ethical, given the NASW Code of Ethics calling for cultural competence in practice, that we challenge and test the rationales being offered.

“In 2001, the NASW published additional guidelines specific to culturally competent practice, outlining standards relating to ethics and values, self-awareness, and cross-cultural knowledge and skills. Following up on these guidelines for culturally competent practice, the NASW National Committee on
Racial and Ethnic Diversity developed specific indicators (NASW, 2007) to encourage self-assessment on the part of social workers and suggested specific ways to evaluate each of the Standards on Culturally Competent Practice. Indicators related to self-awareness, cross-cultural knowledge, and understanding racial privilege are included, highlighting the importance of the topic of this research" (Loya, 2012, p. 25). The same study that discussed the updated guidelines laid forth by the NASW, also discussed disparities, and shortcomings, found among the social workers who participated in their study.

This study was very interesting as it took a close look at the white racial attitudes held by social work practitioners, and how this may, and most likely does, impact provision of care to clients of color. The article discusses the fact that approximately 85% of LCSW’s self-identify as white, with only 7% being Black. This is relevant because while most of the participants in the study admitted feeling less than prepared to work with clients of color, and felt best about working with clients that shared their ethnicity, only 68% of the general population is White, non-Hispanic. The study also shows that the majority of the participants did not see how race or ethnicity affected social interactions or how they would impact opportunities. The sample used for this study was pulled directly from the NASW, which is concerning, given the NASW Code of Ethics insists on culturally competent practice, however its members hold attitudes that do not align with the professions ethics. Therefore, this article calls to action social workers’ need to “look within examining their own concepts of privilege,
experiences with racism, and underlying perceptions of themselves, in order to move along the continuum of culturally competent practice” (Loya, 2012, p. 31).

This study is eye-opening and necessary to the profession. It challenges each and every reader, especially if within the social work profession; to self-examine, and engage in professional growth and development, in order to not only align with the NASW Code of Ethics, which govern our practice, but also to address personal biases that may impact the care given to clients.

As indicated above, while social work claims to be ‘culturally competent’ and focused on diversity, research continues to show that services are “unfriendly” to minorities. “Current research estimates that African-American men are approximately 30% more likely to report having a mental illness compared to non-Hispanic Whites, and are less likely to receive proper diagnosis and treatment” (Holden, McGregor, Blanks, & Mahaffey, 2012, p. 63). Research also shows that the African-American male teens are 4 times more likely to commit suicide than White teens; accounting for more than 80% of all suicides, yet they too, are not coming forward and seeking help (Lindsey & Marcell, 2012, p. 354). The question is, “Why? What is keeping these Black males, of all ages, from seeking services before it’s ‘too late?’

The answer found in mass media, in some research, and even among clinicians and social work service providers may be heavily influenced by stereotypes, myths, and assumptions. This writer found only two studies that spoke directly to the fact that social work service practitioners may be biased and
offering services that have been tailored to fit the assumptions of what will engage the Black male, rather than services based on feedback from those being served; the Black male. According to the literature, it is highly likely that Black males have an overall distrust for service providers, and feel that they will be disrespected and disregarded as “objects, stereotypes, suspects, deviants, or in the terms of the late Black Panther, Elderidge Cleaver, as ‘super masculine menials’” (Braxton-Newby & Jones, Authentic Engagement: Practice with African-American Males, 2014, p. 261). Holden et al. (2012) completed a study on the factors influencing mental health help-seeking among African American men and found that “research has indicted that there can be real or perceived barriers to help-seeking. Some of the issues may relate to cultural attitudes, previous unsatisfactory contacts with professional caregivers, lack of trust in mental health professionals, issues of confidentiality, gender role socialization, a belief that nothing can help change the situation of distress, fears of negative repercussions such as being institutionalized, a lack of knowledge of the helping resources, and resources that are inaccessible or too costly” (Holden, McGregor, Blanks, & Mahaffey, 2012, p. 65).

As professional social workers, who aim to serve with a level of cultural humility, while bringing our own cultural backgrounds, social workers could be considered ‘hybrids’ when it comes to assessing and conceptualizing this problem. On one hand, we may have a shared experience with the thousands of Black men that have been reared in an environment that values strength,
community, and independence. From a strengths-based perspective, it is this specific upbringing has made us the strong and capable social workers that we are today, and yet, it may have also created some of our greatest challenges and barriers in terms of approaching and seeking health and balance in our own lives. Lindsey and Marcell (2012) studied some of the barriers to help seeking among Black males, and found three themes; 1) Taking care of it oneself; 2) Interacting with potential sources of help; and 3) "Tipping Points." The general idea was that Black males feel a sense of strength and pride in being able to handle things on their own, without asking for outside assistance. The study shows that it is the participant’s belief that, as a man, they have been raised to endure and figure things out on their own. In addition, they also felt that if they needed to engage or interact with helpers, their willingness would depend on who the helper was, if they were trustworthy, if they “understood” them, and it was preferred that it was within their informal support systems. Finally, the help was usually only sought out when things had gotten so bad that help was one of the only viable options; “the tipping point.” Participants felt that given they had lived through some difficult things, both within their own families and amongst society, that figuring out life was something that should be handled “in house” rather than among the public. They felt that what they had been through is what made them the capable men they are, and were reserved about admitting that this was not enough to keep them healthy (Lindsey & Marcell, 2012).
People of color, Blacks in particular, often report feelings of isolation and feeling ostracized by their own community for appearing to ‘act White,’ due to choices in career, spouse, adherence to a set of ethics, and even the type of music enjoyed, when these things fall outside of the cultural norm. Within the African-American community, reports indicate that it is very difficult to step outside of the cultural norms and expectations without feeling like ‘who you are’ is being lost. However, would not be ethical for social scientists and practitioners, to assume that these are the only reasons Black males would not seek services. It is important to give this community, and its men, a voice of their own. We need to ask them.

This is not only important to the members of the Black community and the families within it, but also to the profession of social work. First, it is important to note that, when asking lay people about their perceptions of ‘social workers,’ they may not be clear on the differences between disciplines within the helping professions, and most likely don’t care. If a person who they have encountered identified themselves as a ‘social worker’ then they are/were a social worker. This alone should be concerning to us, as a profession. Who is misrepresenting the role of social worker, and what can we do to dispel the negative images associated with them? We, as BASW’s and MSW’s should be concerned with providing culturally competent, and “Black Male friendly” services; services that are focused on ‘authentic engagement,’ and respecting the client as an individual, rather than generalized approaches. We should practice what we
preach and ‘meet the client where they are’ and not where their non-black counterparts are. Ultimately, it is essential that social work professionals, service providers, agencies, educators, students/interns seeking social work degrees, and above all, skeptical African American males needing services be concerned with finding a way to eliminate the barriers that prevent help-seeking among this population.

Purpose of the Study

Although this research study is intended to focus on understanding the ‘disconnect’ that seems to exist between social workers and the African-American males that need, but are not seeking their services, the literature on this direct issue is almost non-existent. Of the 15 journals reviewed in this paper, there were only two that discussed the idea that social workers’ perspective about Black males may be jaded by the images, assumptions and stereotypes produced by mass media. While the role of the social worker is paramount in addressing the factors that impact the Black male and his family, “peer-reviewed social work in this area is difficult to acquire and consolidate. A search in Google on evidence of social work role’s in the lives of Black and/or African-American men suggests this area is under developed, as it generates sparse results” (Watkins, Hawkins, & Mitchell, 2015, p. 241). What is mentioned by Watkins, Hawkins & Mitchell (2015), is that there is an “‘invisible presence of Black men in the social work research, policy and practice,” which has been

This “invisibility” among Black males is seen, not only in terms of what is not being studied by social workers, but also as a part of the African-American male’s experience within society. He “may feel a sense of ‘psychological invisibility’ when dealing with prejudice, discrimination and racism which in turn hinders their ability to develop certain adaptive behaviors to cope with simultaneous personal, familial, community, and societal stressors” (Holden, McGregor, Blanks, & Mahaffey, 2012, p. 65). Research indicates that African American males, across the lifespan, are at a substantially greater risk of violence, such as homicide and violent crimes; low graduation rates with only 48% of African American males earning a high school diploma in 2003, and higher rates of incarceration than that of their non-Black counterparts, which has been correlated with low employment opportunities (Miller & Bennett, 2011, p. 265). “Current research estimates that African-American men are approximately 30% more likely to report having a mental illness compared to non-Hispanic Whites, and are less likely to receive proper diagnosis and treatment” (Holden, McGregor, Blanks, & Mahaffey, 2012, p. 63). African-American male teens are 1.6 times more likely to commit suicide than White teens; accounting for more than 80% of all suicides, yet they too, are not coming forward and seeking help (Lindsey & Marcell, 2012, p. 354).
It is very significant to understand and dissect this dilemma. The more we understand, the better we can initiate appropriate and adequate change. In addition to understanding the true reasons that African-American males avoid help-seeking with social work providers, it was helpful to explore how these providers truly perceive African-American males. Social work is about engagement and assessment of issues, in order to develop a constructive and effective treatment plan toward a better quality of life. However, if this engagement is skewed by negative perceptions and/or misunderstandings between the client (Black males) and the social worker, the interaction becomes ineffective, which may result in the client leaving feeling unheard, de-valued, and resentful, and the misconceptions held by the social worker about these Black males clients being confirmed.

While exploring the perceptions of Black males regarding social workers and the gaps in understanding, the myths associated with these misunderstandings can be resolved. This could result in services that are being appropriately tailored to the ‘real needs’ of the clients, from the client’s perspective. It would also result in a higher satisfaction for the social worker.

Within this study, it is my objective to influence, educate, and hopefully change the way the social work profession approaches and renders services to the Black males. It is also my hope to directly ask and hear the beliefs Black males have about social workers in order to be educated, and in turn, pass along my findings to the social work profession, with the ultimate goal being an
increased level of understanding and establishment of trust, and willingness for culturally aware collaboration on both sides. First, it is my mission to educate social workers through awareness, and redefined training approaches towards the existing limitations of the problem within the field. Secondly, it is critical to acknowledge and establish transparency with existing and new clients, addressing social workers’ openness, and willingness, to relearn and change the way they intend to approach this particular population in the future. Finally, I attempted, to bridge the gap of understanding between what is accurate, about who social workers really are, and how their roles can be vital within the African American communities.

While implementing this research, I decided it would be most effective, to utilize quantitative research; Likert scaled surveys while conducting this study. In an effort to avoid some of the limitations discussed above, this writer decided to use a Quota Sample, in order to get a well-balanced sample of Black men, across adulthood. Although it would be best to start at a younger age, obtaining approval to interview minors may affect the ability to use a quota sample. The goal was to gather a minimum of 15 surveys from within 4 different age categories; 18-25yo, 26-45yo, 46-65yo, and 65+. This would be a minimum of 60 surveys. However, I was only able to gather a total of 59 surveys, including 16 incomplete surveys.
Research Question

Based on the findings and significant need to improve the mental health services for African American males, the following research question was proposed:

“What are the beliefs about Social Workers among Black Males?”
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This section of the study outlines and explores some of the peer-reviewed literature pertaining to help-seeking behaviors and barriers among Black males, as well as the ‘disconnects’ that exist between social work providers and these males. It also examines how psychological, socioeconomic and environmental factors, as well as the beliefs of Black males about social workers, impacts their willingness to access social work services. Finally, it examines the involvement of social workers with this social problem, and the NASW’s focus on their responsibility to do so.

The literature endorses the underutilization of services by Black males and limited help-seeking on their part due to “stigma of mental illness, lack of knowledge, affordability, lack of trust, impersonal service, and lack of cultural understanding and sensitivity” (Thompson, Akbar, & Brzile, 2002, p. 1). It has also been noted that there is are “heightened concerns [among Black males] about trust and confidentiality when interacting with others (social level), and perceiving negative community beliefs about mental health care (community level)” (Lindsey & Marcell, 2012, p. 360).
Gaps in Literature

While examining and reviewing the literature, there seems to be a consensus that it is a combination of institutional racism, cultural norms and expectations, lack of cultural competence and understanding, negative interactions with social service providers, and environmental barriers (e.g. income, insurance coverage, transportation, location of services) that has influenced the low help-seeking among African American males. However, according to Gary & Leashore (1982) what has historically been lacking in the research are:

A tendency to focus on pathology rather than strengths, 2) poor sampling and research designs, 3) inappropriate and unreliable research instruments, 4) inadequate models and theoretical assumptions, 5) a tendency to assume a common Black experience, 6) a propensity to focus on low-income groups in the Black community, and 7) a tendency to concentrate on captive subjects, especially prisoners and mental patients. (Gary & Leashore, 1982, p. 54)

Although the Gary & Leashore study as published in 1982, more current research maintains very similar concerns, especially given that a journal published in 2015 documented the lack of social work research addressing specific work with Black males. On this same idea, it is important to note that many of the journals and studies were completed by non-social work helping professionals, such as psychologists and sociologists, whose disciplines do not
share the same generalist and holistic approach as the social work field. Therefore, many of the Black males being served may believe that they have received social work services, but may have never actually worked with a degreed BASW, MSW, or LCSW.

Finally, but not all inclusively, research shows an overall lack of feedback being sought from the males we are attempting to serve. “Missing from contemporary debates are studies that explicitly ask African American men to articulate what manhood means for them,” nor are they being explicitly and directly surveyed about how their interactions, experiences with, and/or perceptions of social workers affects their utilization of services (Hammond & Mattis, 2005, p. 114). It is also important to note that research seems to shy away from the explicit inquiry of the true personal and professional perspectives of social workers regarding Black males and their desire and ability to benefit from services.

Methodological Limitations

Although the studies sought to be as inclusive and generalizable as possible there were limitations discussed throughout the literature. As mentioned above, Bogart & Leashore (1982) gave a historical account of the areas in which the research methodologies and research tools were flawed and/or lacking. Although almost 30 years has passed since the publishing of that article, not much has changed. There still seems to be a “failure to address sociodemographic variability among African American men’s depression”
(Hammond W., 2012, p. S232). Many of the studies have historically been conducted with “captive participants,” and while they may have volunteered to participate, the sample is not representative of all Black males. The same would stand true for research that has been found to be heavily focused around and conducted with low-income, minimally educated males in impoverished areas, and not across the spectrum of education levels and socioeconomic statuses. This results in research that is reflective of only one sub-group within an entire group of men. Sample sizes also tended to be smaller, and isolated to small community groups, which again, is not generalizable to the greater population of African-American males within the U.S.

Another limitation among the research lies in the area of examining attitudes and perceptions of Black males under the age of 18 years old in terms of stigma and importance of social support. “Much of what is known about mental health stigma among children and adolescents is based in adult studies of mental illness, relies on adults’ perception of childhood stigma rather than children’s own perceptions, and often does not include race-specific information” (Lindsay, Joe, & Nebbitt, 2010, p. 459). Since research is calling for social workers and researchers to incorporate a more holistic and accurate, ‘Afrocentric’ approach to service provision, this should also include more appropriate interventions and services along the lifespan. Again, the services are tailored toward what ‘we believe’ is needed, rather than seeking explicit feedback for the
populations we are attempting to serve (Braxton-Newby & Jones, Authentic Engagement: Practice with African-American Males, 2014).

Conflicting Findings

What can be generally agreed upon within the literature is that African American males are less likely than their White counterparts to help-seek, and the Black culture and community is foundationally built on specific definitions of strength, self-reliance, and “keeping the family business within the family.” What much of the research shows is that while African American males truly need mental health and other social services, they are far less likely to actually receive the services that non-Blacks, which is often directly linked to the cultural mistrust that exists between Black males and service providers. However, “in a number of recent studies with African American samples, cultural mistrust was not predictive of treatment seeking. Moreover, using data from Robins and Regier’s (1991) National Comorbidity Study, Diala and colleagues (2000) found that African Americans were more predisposed to seek professional services, more comfortable talking about problems with a professional, and less embarrassed about friends knowing about professional service use, prior to engaging in services relative to Whites” (Youman, Drapalski, Stuart, Bagley, & Tangney, 2010, p. 13). The same was found in a study with a sample of young Adults who, when asked directly, reported that they did not believe seeking services indicated weakness on their part, and did not feel that “asking for help” would be embarrassing for them. However, when asked about the dealing with sadness of
depression, one young man in this sample stated, “I thought that was a part of being a man, dealing with your problems on your own. You feel me? Finding the solution on your own.” While another adult participant stated, “If something going wrong with me and I don’t know what to do about it, I’m going to Jesus first before I go to anybody. I tell you, I’m hittin’ that Bible” (Lindsey & Marcell, 2012, p. 357). This is reflective of the research that shows that “men seem to express the importance of assuming responsibility for family, community, spiritual life, provision (spirituality and economic), as well as for themselves” (Hammond & Mattis, 2005, p. 121).

The idea that Black men are not seeking service due to stigma and fear of judgment from their own community has been confirmed through data collection, however there are conflicting bodies of research that indicate that there are high levels of social support around these issues, as well. Although there is an undeniable disparity between Blacks who seek and receive services and their counterparts, it can no longer be assumed that this is primarily due to a cultural rule against seeking services. One study showed that despite masculine role identity and “macho messages” taught within the Black family, “men may actually be more likely to look for help when they perceive an opportunity to reciprocate” (Addis & Mahalik, 2003, p. 11). Although they are resistant or leery to seek help, especially when the issue seems abnormal or unique, the resistance is buffered a bit by the opportunity to “pay it forward.” It seems to normalize the situation, which reduces the feelings of being different or weird, while allowing for the male
to find redemption in the ability to help another in the way he was helped (Addis & Mahalik, 2003). This not only gives us a clearer understanding of positive engagement interventions, but also dispels the overarching myth that the African American male is a “problem child” who is invested circumventing responsibility.

Finally, this literature review found that while there is quite a bit of research around the psychosocial & cultural factors that negatively influence help-seeking behaviors among African American males, there is little around the logistical barriers that may be more of the cause to low access to services. A study was done with incarcerated males, and their willingness or motivation to seek mental health services while in jail. The assumption was that Black males would avoid services while White males would access services, mirroring the trends of those males who are not incarcerated. However, “no such discrepancies were found in treatment seeking over the course of incarceration” (Youman, Drapalski, stuewig, Bagley, & Tangney, 2010, p. 20). Instead, the outcomes were the same among all ethnicities. This study actually supported a different hypothesis that believes that it is probably more often “logistical system barriers or lack of enabling resources in the community, rather than psychocultural predisposing barriers of the individual” that account for the disparities in service engagement (Youman, Drapalski, stuewig, Bagley, & Tangney, 2010, p. 21).
Theoretical Guiding Conceptualizations

While examining the research, there were two primary theoretical approaches to understanding Black males and their perceptions about social service providers and the utilization of services. 1) Social construction perspectives that look to “gain a clear understanding of the social, psychological, and environmental dynamics that may be linked to the myriad of disparate outcomes experienced by the African American male across the lifespan” (Miller & Bennett, 2011, p. 266). This perspective and approach challenges us to understand interweaving factors that cannot be compartmentalized, but may create a ‘cocktail of issues and consequences’ for the male. This theory states that it is through one’s definitions of masculinity, strength or weakness, self-worth, community, etc. that choices are made. While this is only a sub-theory utilized in research, it is important to note that Lindsey et al (2010), discussed research done in 1989 (Link, Cullen, Struening, Shrout, and Dohrenwend) that examined adolescent help-seeking among Black adolescent boys through modified labeling theory. This theory states that “labeling or stigma may either induce a state of vulnerability that increases the likelihood of a person experiencing repeated episodes of a disorder, or, labeling and stigma may be the cause of negative outcomes that place mentally ill persons at risk for reoccurrence or prolongation of disorders that may have emanated from other causes (Lindsay, Joe, & Nebbitt, 2010, p. 460).
Along this same vein is the “Person in Environment (PIE) theoretical construct used to explain the relationship between one’s environment and life experience” (Braxton-Newby & Jones, Authentic Engagement: Practice with African-American Males, 2014, p. 261). This approach challenges us to not become overly focused on the issue, but rather on the triggers and causal factors that underlie the presenting problem. This in no way seeks to absolve the males of their responsibility for their own thoughts, actions and behaviors, but rather, seeks to understand the ‘whys’ of their choices in order to assist them in learning new and more effective coping strategies.

“According to the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), the purpose of the social work profession is to ‘promote human and community well-being’ (EPAS, 2008, p.1)...The purpose of promoting human and community well-being is ‘guided by a person in environment construct, a global perspective, respect for human diversity, and knowledge based on scientific inquiry’ (EPAS, 2008, p.1). ‘Guided by a person in environment construct’ suggests that social workers always examine individual behavior in its context, reflecting how that behavior is both a response to and, in turn, influences the individual’s environment. Adopting a ‘global perspective’ suggests that the profession look beyond its natural borders in assessing needs.”

(Hepworth & Rooney, 2010, pp. 5-6)
Summary

This chapter included a review of peer-reviewed research and literature about the disparities that exist among the social services being provided to Black males, and its impact on their help-seeking. It also examined the involvement of social workers and/or social service providers with provision of culturally competent care. The literature defined the issue as a social problem, highlighted those affected, and recognized the call for increased cultural awareness and humility on the part of services providers to meet the diverse needs of Black males. It also reviewed both the methodological limitations and conflicted findings within the literature. Finally, included was the theoretical orientation and guiding concepts used to support the study; Social construction and Person-in-Environment.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

Chapter Three addresses the choice of study design and why this choice is best suited for this study. It also discusses the sampling process; how the study participants were chosen and how data was gathered. Finally, the chapter closes by outlining the procedures for data gathering, including how data was collected, recorded and analyzed.

Sampling

A non-probability method, specifically a purposive sample, was used to recruit participants from among 4 distinct age groups of Black males: 18-25 yo, 26-45yo, 46-65yo, and 65+. The pool of participants will span across the U.S. and will be recruiting will be done through means of social media and word of mouth. Purposive sampling was chosen based on Herbert Rubin and Irene Rubin (1995) [who] suggest three guidelines for designing a purposive sample, which include: “1) Knowledge about the cultural arena or situation or experience being studied, 2) Willingness to talk, and 3) Representative of the range of points of view” (Schutt, 2014, p. 309). In order to be meet criteria to participate in this study, participants must identify as a Black male, and be over the age of 18 years old. All Black males, over the age of 18 were invited to participate, regardless of their level of personal experience with social work and/or social workers.
Data Collection and Instruments

The data collection occurred by way of a self-administered, electronic survey developed and offered through Survey Monkey. It was comprised of 35 questions designed to capture a comprehensive and representative picture of the beliefs of Black males about social work and social workers, and their correlation with the level of personal experience had with accessing social work services.

The Understandings and Beliefs about Social Workers Scale was developed by Harris (2015), and explored four specific areas: Section 1 – Black males’ understanding of social work as a profession (5 questions), Section 2 – Black males’ beliefs about social workers, in general (10 questions), Section 3 – Black males’ beliefs about how social workers see the clients they serve (13 questions), and Section 4 – Socio-Demographics (7 questions). The survey sought to explore whether the belief of Black males about social workers (dependent variable) is correlated with the level of personal experience with accessing social work services, using independent variables such as age groups, specific self-identification of ethnic group, and length of affiliation with social workers. The socio-demographic and survey variables for this study were selected from among those used in a variety of studies focused on racial socialization (Lindsey & Marcell, "We're going though a lot of struggles that people don't even know about": The need to understand African-American males' help-seeking for mental health on multiple levels, 2012), micro aggression (Harvey, 2004), white racial consciousness (Nyborg & Curry, 2003), racial
attitudes (Jenkins, 2006), and social work attitudes (Loya, 2012), as well as the researcher’s previous work with Black males in the church and community settings seeking pastoral counseling.

While this study has the potential for offering insights for future research in terms of how these belief systems may contribute to service access by Black males, it is limited by the sample, and is not inclusive of all Black males across the U.S.

Procedures

Given that this survey was not offered through any agency, but instead participants were recruited by way of social media and 'word of mouth,’ no formal permissions were needed to conduct the study. The electronic survey link was posted on social media, and a snowball approach was utilized to gather data by way of Survey Monkey. The survey was anticipated to take each participant no more than 10-15 minutes to complete, and was self-administered. This survey was anonymous and intended to reach 100+ voluntary participants between the ages of 18 and older. All identifying participant information was kept 100% confidential in order to protect all parties and to encourage the most honest and transparent responses.

Protection of Human Subjects

Participants were provided with an informed consent at the beginning of the electronic survey, and this consent needed to be acknowledged and
approved, by the participant, prior to being granted access to begin the survey. This informed consent and correlated survey was be IRB approved. The informed consent invited participation on a voluntary basis, and outlined the expectations for potential of harm if they chose to participate, and no consequences if they elected not to participate. Participants were informed that all data gathered through their responses would remain confidential.

Data Analysis

Univariate analyses (frequencies, percentages, means and ranges) were performed and reported for each of the following variables: age, specific ethnicity, level of education, income level, level of personal experience with accessing services offered by social workers, and length of affiliation with social workers.

Bivariate analyses were performed and reported on each of the following independent variables with the dependent variable; the beliefs of Black males about social workers: age, specific ethnicity, level of education, income level, level of personal experience with accessing services offered by social workers, and length of affiliation with social workers. A Pearson r statistic was used to determine the strength of a linear relationship for each, assuming certain assumptions are met.

Summary

Chapter Three outlined the study design, including what variables would be the focus of study and the rationale for the research study. The criteria for
participation and the sampling methods were also reviewed and outlined. The plan for data collection, as well as a discussion about the design and rationale for the research tool (electronic survey) were included, as well as implications for future research opportunities. Procedures for the study, including recruitment of participants, informed consent, and protection of Human Subjects was also covered. The chapter closes with an overview of the intended plan for data analysis, including measurement and correlation tests that were used and the exploration of what relationships exist between the dependent variable (the beliefs of Black males about social workers) and the many independent variables listed above, for the purposes of future studies.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Socio-demographic data were collected from the respondents, such as, age, specific ethnicity, level of education, and income level. Additional background data were also collected that included the respondent’s level of personal experience with accessing services offered by social workers, and length of affiliation with social workers.

The demographic of respondents (N=59) who participated in the survey are exhibited in Table 1. However, it is important to note that only 43 surveys were started and completed, with 3 respondents reporting their gender as other than male; leaving a total of 40 completed surveys. Fifty-six respondents met criteria for the study, and participated through social media (Facebook), and through accessing the electronic survey link through friends, family and/or acquaintances (“word of mouth”). Respondents ranged in age from 18-55+, and were surveyed in three groups; Group 1: 18-29 yrs (n=15; 25.1 %; valid=34.9%), Group 2: 30-54 yrs (n=26; 44.1%; valid=60.5%), and Group 3: 55+ (n=4; 3..4%; valid=4.7%), with the mean age group being 30-54 yrs (mean = 1.6977; 44.1%; valid=60.5%). According to the date, there were also missing data (n=16; 27.1%). While the survey was designed to measure the understanding and beliefs of males (n=40; 67.8%; valid=93%), there were respondents who, when
asked to verify their gender as male, responded with “no” (n=3; 5.1%; valid=7%).

According to the data, there were also missing data (n=16; 27.1%).

Of those surveyed, the majority of respondents identified themselves as Black / African-American (n=34; 68%; valid=57.6%), followed by Black/Other (n=7; 14%; valid=11.9%), Black /Latino (n=4; 8%; valid=6.8%), Black / Bi-racial (n=3; 6%; valid=5.1%) and Black / African-born (n=2; 4%; valid=3.4%).

According to the data, there were also missing data (n=9; 15.2%). Those who identified as “Other” were comprised of Asian, Caribbean, Native American, and Caucasian.

The majority of the respondents indicated that they had no personal experience with receiving services provided by a social worker (n=14; 23.7%; valid=32.6%), and 8 respondents reported that they were friends with an individual who receives or has received services provided by a social worker (n=8; 13.6%; valid=18.6%). The remaining respondents (n=21; 39.9%; valid=48.8%), had the most direct, personal experience, being either directly receiving services provided by a social worker, being a child of a parent who is or has received services provided by a social worker, being a sibling or parent of an individual receiving these services, or being a caretaker of a child or individual who receives services provided by a social worker. According to the data, there were also missing data (n=16; 27.1%). The respondents were also surveyed about the length of time related to their access of these services provided by social workers, to which the majority reported either no affiliation with social
workers (n=15; 25.4%; valid=35.7%), or receiving services for less than 3 years (n=12; 20.3%; valid=28.6%). These were followed by those who had received services for 10+ years (n=8; 13.6%; valid=19%), 3-5 years (n=6; 10.2%; 14.3%) and those who received services for 7-9 years (n=1; 1.7%; valid=2.4%). According to the data, there were also missing data (n=17; 28.8%).

Furthermore, the respondents were surveyed about their level of education, specific to whether they completed high school, earned a GED or high school diploma, attended college, or earned a college degree at the undergraduate or graduate levels. The majority of respondents indicated that they had “some college” (n=22; 37.3%; valid=51.2%), followed by a Graduate degree (n=11; 18.6%; valid=25.6%), an undergraduate degree (n=6; 10.2%; valid=14%), a high school diploma (n=2; 3.4%; valid=4.7%), a General Educational Development (GED) – High School Equivalency certificate (n=1; 1.7%; valid=2.3%) and no high school completion (n=1; 1.7%; valid=2.3%). According to the data, there were also missing data (n=16; 27.1%).

Finally, the respondents were surveyed about their income level in order to establish the socioeconomic status of the participants. The data was presented and gathered in five categories with the majority of the respondents indicating that they earned $0-24,999 per year (n=14; 23.7%; valid 32.6%) and $25,000-49,999 per year (n=13; 22%; valid=30.2%), followed by $50,000-74,999 per year (n=8; 13.6%; valid=18.6%), $75,000-99,999 per year (n=2; 2%;
and $100,000 per year (n=6; 10.2%; valid=14%. According to the
data, there were also missing data (n=16; 27.1%).

Table 1. Socio-Demographics of Respondents (N=59)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current Age</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
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</tr>
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</tr>
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<td>Frequency</td>
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<td>Valid Percent</td>
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<td>--------------------</td>
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<td>11.6</td>
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<td>4) Caretaker of a child or adult who receives or who has rec</td>
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<td>5) Friend of an individual who receives or has received serv</td>
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<td>18.6</td>
<td>67.4</td>
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<td>6) No personal experience with services offered by social wo</td>
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Missing System 16 27.1

Total 59 100.0
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</table>

Understanding Scale Characteristics

Table 2 displays the characteristics of the understanding scale utilized in this exploratory study. The dependent variable was a 5 point scale / survey that measured the general understanding of the social work profession (i.e. requirements of a college degree, population’s served, professional code of ethics, and licensure and regulatory oversight). Each correct answer on each of the five items was coded as a “1,” while each incorrect answer and/or the option of “I am undecided about this,” were coded as a “0”. A maximum of 5 points was possible, as was a minimum score of 0.
To ensure that parametric tests could be performed, a kurtosis and skewness tests were performed on the dependent variables. Some negative skewness and positive kurtosis were observed, however both tests produced statistics that provided evidence that the assumption of normality was adequately met.

The Total Understanding Scale had a possible range of 0-5; 0 indicating no understanding, and 5 indicating a very high level of understanding. There was an observed range of 1-3. The average mean score was 2.05 with a standard deviation of .436. According to the data, there were also missing data (n=1; 1.7%).
Table 2. Total Understanding Characteristics of Respondents  (N=59)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistics</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid 1</td>
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<td>6.9</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>79.7</td>
<td>81.0</td>
<td>87.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>58</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

General Beliefs about Social Workers’ Scale Characteristics

Table 3 displays the characteristics of the General Beliefs scale utilized in this exploratory study. The dependent variable was a 10 point scale / survey that measured the general beliefs of black males about social workers. Each of the 10 questions were based on a Likert scale of 1-5; 1 reflecting the most negative belief and 5 reflecting the most positive beliefs. A maximum of 5 points per question was possible, as was a minimum score of zero; totaling a maximum score of 50, and minimum of 1 for each participant.

To ensure that parametric tests could be performed, a kurtosis and skewness tests were performed on the dependent variables. Some negative skewness and positive kurtosis were observed, however both tests produced
statistics that provided evidence that the assumption of normality was adequately met.

The General Beliefs Scale had a possible range of 10-50; 10 indicating completely negative beliefs about social workers, and 50 indicating very positive beliefs about social workers. There was an observed range of 14-34. The average mean score was 25.96 with a standard deviation of 4.601. According to the data, there were also missing data (n=10; 16.9%).
### Table 3. General Beliefs Characteristics of Respondents (N=59)

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Percent</th>
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<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>21</td>
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<td>34.7</td>
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<td>25</td>
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<td>10.2</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>46.9</td>
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<td>34</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Missing System</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>16.9</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total 59 100.0
Beliefs about Social Workers’ Perceptions Scale Characteristics

Table 4 displays the characteristics of the Beliefs about Social workers’ Perceptions Scale utilized in this exploratory study. The dependent variable was a 13 point scale / survey that measured the beliefs of black males about social workers and their perceptions of Black males. Each of the 13 questions were based on a Likert scale of 1-5; 1 reflecting the most negative belief and 5 reflecting the most positive beliefs. A maximum of 5 points per question was possible, as was a minimum score of zero; totaling a maximum score of 65, and minimum of 13 for each participant.

To ensure that parametric tests could be performed, a kurtosis and skewness tests were performed on the dependent variables. Some negative skewness and kurtosis were observed, however both tests produced statistics that provided evidence that the assumption of normality was adequately met.

The Beliefs about Social workers’ Perceptions Scale had a possible range of 13-65; 13 indicating completely negative beliefs about social workers, and 65 indicating very positive beliefs about social workers. There was an observed range of 18-58. The average mean score was 40.81 with a standard deviation of 8.680. According to the data, there were also missing data (n=16; 27.1%).
Table 4. Beliefs about Social workers’ Perceptions Scale  (N=59)

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<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
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<td>1.7</td>
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<td>2.3</td>
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<td>27</td>
<td>1.7</td>
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<tr>
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<td>29</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>9.3</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1.7</td>
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<td>49</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>81.4</td>
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</table>
Correlation of Total Understanding of Social Work with Beliefs and Perceptions

Table 5 reveals the results of a Pearson r correlation coefficient ran to assess for the linear relationship between Black male’s total understanding of the social work profession and their general beliefs about social workers. The data suggests that the level of understanding about the social work profession \( (r = -0.313, p = .030) \) has a negative correlation with the general beliefs about social work.

Table 6 reveals the results of a Pearson r correlation coefficient ran to assess for the linear relationship between Black male’s total understanding of the social work profession and their beliefs about the perceptions of social workers about them. The data suggests that the level of understanding about the social
work profession \( (r= .139, p=.379) \) is a correlation with the beliefs about social workers' perceptions of Black males.

Table 5. Correlation between Understanding of the Social Work Profession and General Beliefs about Social Workers \( (N=59) \)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>BM perceptions of SWers</th>
<th>Gen Beliefs SW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BM perceptions of SWers Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-.592**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen Beliefs SW</td>
<td>-.592**</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
Table 6. Correlation between Understanding of the Social Work Profession and Beliefs about Social workers’ Perceptions  (N=59)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BM perceptions of SWers</th>
<th>Total Understanding Scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BM perceptions of SWers</th>
<th>Total Understanding Scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Correlation of Beliefs and Perceptions with Age, Level of Education, SES, and Level of Experience with Social Workers

A one-way between-groups analysis of variance was conducted (See Table 6) to explore the impact of age on the general belief about social workers, as well as on the beliefs participants held with regard to the perceptions of social workers’ about Black males, as measured by the survey tool. Participants were divided into three groups according to their age (Group 1: 18-29; Group 2: 30-54; Group 3: 55 and above). When examining the Beliefs about social workers perceptions, there was a statistically significant difference at the p< .05 level in the scores for the three age groups: F (2, 39) = 4.613, p= .016. Post Hoc comparisons using Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for Group 1
(M= 45.87, SD= 7.16) was significantly different from Group 2: (M = 37.84, SD= 8.365). Group 3: (M= 40.00, SD= 12.728) did not differ significantly from either Group 1 or 2. When examining the General Beliefs, there was not a statistically significant difference in the scores for the three age groups: F (2, 39) = .510, p=.604.

Independent sample t-tests were performed (See Table 7) to compare beliefs and perceptions scores by level of personal experience with receiving services provided by a social worker. The t-test sought to compare two groups; those who received direct services provided by social workers (n=11) with those who reported to have no affiliation or experience with receiving services provided by social workers (n=14). Table 7 indicates that there was no significant difference between the two groups; Directly received services (M= 26.27; SD= 5.198), and those who reported to have no affiliation or experience with receiving services provided by social workers (M= 25.43; SD= 4.783; t (23)=.422, p=.677), in terms of their General beliefs about social workers, nor any significant difference between the two groups; Directly received services (M= 38.00; SD= 12.025), and those who reported to have no affiliation or experience with receiving services provided by social workers (M= 40.57; SD= 8.225; t (23)= -.635, p=.532), in terms of their beliefs about social workers’ perceptions of Black males. The magnitude of the difference in the means for General Beliefs (mean difference = .844, 95% CI: -3.296 to 4.985) was very small (eta squared = .008). The magnitude of the difference in the means for Beliefs about social workers’
perceptions (mean difference = -2.571, 95% CI: -10.952 to 5.809) was small (eta squared = .017).

A one-way between-groups analysis of variance was conducted (See Table 8) to explore the impact of level of education on the general belief about social workers, as well as on the beliefs participants held with regard to the perceptions of social workers’ about Black males, as measured by the survey tool. Participants were divided into six groups by level of education (Group 1: No high school diploma or GED; Group 2: GED; Group 3: High School Diploma; Group 4: Some College; Group 5: Undergraduate Degree; Group 6: Graduate Degree). When examining the Beliefs about social workers perceptions, there was not a statistically significant difference in the scores for the six groups: F (5, 36) = .605, p = .697. When examining the General Beliefs, there was not a statistically significant difference in the scores for the three age groups: F (5, 36) = .661, p = .654.

Finally, a one-way between-groups analysis of variance was conducted (See Table 9) to explore the impact of level of income on the general belief about social workers, as well as on the beliefs participants held with regard to the perceptions of social workers’ about Black males, as measured by the survey tool. Participants were divided into five groups by level of income (Group 1: $0-24,999; Group 2: $25,000-49,999; Group 3: $50,000-74,999; Group 4: $75,000-99,999; Group 5: $100,000+). When examining the Beliefs about social workers perceptions, there was not a statistically significant difference in the scores for
the five groups: \( F(4, 37) = .786, p = .542 \). When examining the General Beliefs, there was not a statistically significant difference in the scores for the three age groups: \( F(4, 37) = 1.331, p = .277 \).

Table 7. Result of One-Way Analysis of Variance to explore impact of Age on Beliefs and Perceptions  

\( (N=42) \)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Gen Beliefs</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>SW Between Groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>BM perceptions</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of SWers Between</td>
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<td>302.691</td>
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<td>Groups</td>
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<td>Within Groups</td>
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Table 8. Result of t-Test for General Beliefs about Social Workers and Beliefs about Social workers’ Perceptions by Level of Personal Experience with Receiving Services Provided by a Social Worker

<table>
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<th>Levene's Test for Equality of Variances</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
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<tr>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
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<td>.206</td>
<td>.681</td>
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Table 9. Result of One-Way Analysis of Variance to Explore Impact of Level of Education on Beliefs and Perceptions (N=42)

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<tr>
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<th>Sum of Squares</th>
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<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
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<td><strong>Gen Beliefs SW</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>74.976</td>
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<td>14.995</td>
<td>.654</td>
<td>.661</td>
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<td>Within Groups</td>
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<td><strong>BM perceptions of SWers</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>245.249</td>
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<td>49.050</td>
<td>.605</td>
<td>.697</td>
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<td>2919.227</td>
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Table 10. Result of One-Way Analysis of Variance to Explore Impact of Level of Income on Beliefs and Perceptions  (N=42)

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<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
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<td>BM perceptions of SWers</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
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Summary

Univariate statistics were performed for each variable to describe the sample. Different types of bivariate statistic were also generated. A Pearson $r$ correlated coefficient was performed to assess for a linear relationship between the two variables; Total Understanding of the Social Work Profession and General Beliefs about Social Workers, as well as the two variables; Total Understanding of the Social Work Profession and Beliefs about Social workers’ Perceptions. Independent sample t-tests were performed to compare beliefs and perceptions scores by level of personal experience with receiving services
provided by a social worker. Finally, three one-way between-groups analysis of variance were conducted to assess for differences in mean beliefs and perceptions scores; according to the level of income; level of education, and age of the respondents.
CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION

Introduction

Social work service practitioners may be biased and offering services that have been tailored to fit the assumptions of what will engage the Black male, rather than services based on feedback from those being served; the Black male.

A study conducted by Holden et al. (2012), reported that approximately 85% of LCSW’s self-identify as white, with only 7% being Black. This is relevant because while most of the participants interviewed admitted feeling less than prepared to work with clients of color, and felt best about working with clients that shared their ethnicity, only 68% of the general population is White, non-Hispanic. The study also shows that the majority of the participants did not see how race or ethnicity affected social interactions or how they would impact opportunities. The sample used for this study was pulled directly from the NASW, which is concerning, given the NASW Code of Ethics insists on culturally competent practice, however its members hold attitudes that do not align with the professions ethics (Holden, McGregor, Blanks, & Mahaffey, 2012).

Although the NASW Code of Ethics, calls for social workers to serve “the vulnerable, the oppressed, and those living in poverty (NASW Assembly, 2008)” Black males continue to see themselves as “invisible,” or believe themselves to be perceived as “objects, stereotypes, suspects, deviants, or in the terms of the late Black Panther, Elderidge Cleaver, as ‘super masculine menials’” (Braxton-
Newby & Jones, 2014, p. 261). Unfortunately, these opinions apply to the social works profession.

The purpose of this study was to explore the general knowledge and beliefs about social workers, as well as their beliefs about how social workers perceive them, in order to identify how this may affect access of service provided by social workers. This study was intent on exploring possible reasons for the unserved and underserved status of this population, while beginning to build awareness within the social work profession and academia in order to erase the “invisible” status from this population.

Summary of Findings

The respondents ranged in age from 18-65+, with the largest group falling between 30-54 yrs of age (57.6%). As anticipated, Black American respondents greatly outweighed the respondents of the other sub-cultures (e.g. African-born, multi-ethnic: Asian, Latino, and Caucasian). Of the 43 respondents who completed the survey, the majority of them identified themselves as having had “some college,” (51.2%), and many who had completed undergraduate (14%), and/or graduate (18.6%) degrees, with only 2 of the 43 respondents having no high school or GED / high school equivalent (4.6%). The majority of the respondents indicated that they earned $0-24,999 per year (32.6%), and $25,000-49,999 per year (30.2%), followed by $50,000-74,999 per year (18.6%), $75,000-99,999 per year (3.4%), and $100,000 per year (14%). Of the 43 respondents, the majority indicated that they had no personal experience with
receiving services provided by a social worker (32.6%), and 18.6% of respondents reported that they were friends with an individual who receives or has received services provided by a social worker. The remaining respondents (48.8%), had the most direct, personal experience, being either directly receiving services provided by a social worker, being a child of a parent who is or has received services provided by a social worker, being a sibling or parent of an individual receiving these services, or being a caretaker of a child or individual who receives services provided by a social worker.

The CSWE’s mission states that social workers are “to value and respect diversity, and develop a commitment to cultural humility. The dimensions of diversity are understood as the intersectionality of multiple factors including but not limited to age, class, color, culture, disability and ability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity and expression, immigration status, marital status, political ideology, race, religion/ spirituality, sex, sexual orientation, and tribal sovereign status” (National Association of Social Workers, 2015). However, the results and findings from this exploratory study are impenetrable, due to the implications and insights they provide. The results point not only to a lack of knowledge about social workers, but an even greater lack of trust and belief in the need for or genuineness in the services provided by social workers. Respondents indicated that they were not convinced that social workers were invested in meeting the needs of the Black male, with the understanding of their unique history, or of the shame and difficulty of their experiences. The results of the 10 point general
beliefs scale indicated that of the possible 50 points, which indicated the most positive beliefs about social workers, the mean score was only 25.96, indicating that most of the respondents had an almost ambivalent opinion about the benefits offered by social workers. When it came to their beliefs about how social workers perceived them, as Black males, the results showed a more positive beliefs; the mean score for this 13 point scale, with a range of 13-65, was 40.85. This indicates that approximately two-thirds of the respondents had moderately positive beliefs about how social workers perceive them, as Black males.

The respondents were assessed for their level of general knowledge, using a short 5 point scale. The questions included topics such as level of education required to work as a social worker, populations served by social workers, knowledge about the NASW Code of Ethics, and regulatory nature of professional licensure. A moderately high level of deficiency in knowledge was discovered, with the mean score being 2.05 out of a possible 5 points. The fact that 87.9% of the 59 respondents who completed the Total General Knowledge portion of the survey scored a 2 or less concurs with research by Lindsey and Marcell (2012), regarding barriers to help seeking among Black males. The general idea was that Black males feel a sense of strength and pride in being able to handle things on their own, without asking for outside assistance. In addition, they also felt that if they needed to engage or interact with helpers, their willingness would depend on who the helper was, if they were trustworthy, if they
“understood” them, and it was preferred that it was within their informal support systems (Lindsey & Marcell, "We're ging though a lot of struggles that people don’t even know about": The need to understand African-American males' help-seeking for mental health on multiple levels, 2012).

While many tests were run assess correlations among differing factors (e.g. age, specific ethnic group, income level, level of education, and length / level of personal experience with receiving social work services) with general beliefs and perceptions, only one proved to have a significant difference; age. It was found that those respondents within Group 1 (18-29 years) had responses that differed significantly with those in Group 2 (30-54 years), however neither differed significantly with that of Group 3 (55+ years). Group 2 demonstrated a more positive belief about the perceptions social workers hold about Black males. However, this was not the case, with the same age group, when asked about their beliefs about social workers and their ability to help them. General beliefs about social workers were not shown to be significantly different from one another, and were agreeably negative.

The lack of evidence identifying specific causal factors for the overarching negative beliefs about social workers and the understanding of benefits offered by the services social workers can provide is concerning. What is even more concerning, and in need of immediate attention, is the lack of research and literature addressing these deficits, despite the overwhelming amounts of literature that point to “increased awareness [about] depressed African American
men [who] continue to underutilize mental health treatment [yet] have the highest all-cause mortality rates of any racial/ethnic group in the United States” (Hankerson, Suite, & Bailey, 2015, p. 21). The Black males, and their families who are affected by their untreated conditions, have not been identified as a ‘special population, which, the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago defines as: “Sometimes visible to us, but more often hidden in plain sight, special populations inhabit the margins of our society, each with a unique set of needs. Ethnic minorities, veterans, disabled people, prison inmates, refugees and immigrants, children, and the elderly all face complex challenges as they strive to attain the advantages that other groups enjoy” (NORC - University of Chicago, 2016). The problem is worsened by the fact that many individuals with special needs are dispersed among the general population and their needs not recognized and planned for unless they self-identify and state their requirements … Some people also hesitate to voice their needs for fear of being stigmatized or singled out for special treatment which can be embarrassing for them” (Vogt Sorensen, 2006, p. 2). This appears to indicate and strongly suggest the need for more focused attention by social workers and their governing organizations toward not only defining this group as a special population, but also to then, conducting the advanced research needed in order to address the gaps that exist for them. It also demonstrates an imminent need for a more solid academic focus, within the social work curricula, to not just
identify culture as important, but to train in how to understand, educate and provide services that meet the needs of these special populations

Limitations

Although this exploratory study presents with a number of limitations, they should not be allowed to weaken the importance of this distinct investigation which examines the beliefs and perceptions held by Black males about social workers, their level of investment with the Black male community, and how these beliefs may affect the lack of willingness to access mental health or helping services. Because of the small sample (N=59), and due to only 43 respondents completing the survey, this study may not truly be generalizable to other populations of Black males. Limitations of validity and reliability may also exist due to the survey scale being developed by this researcher. As previously mentioned, there was an unanticipated level of difficulty in getting respondents to participate, and to complete the surveys, however given this was based on a voluntary participation model, participants were encouraged to only participate if and to the point within which they felt comfortable. Despite these limitations, this study can be considered a much needed ‘first step’ toward raising awareness that, while social workers and the organizations that promote them recognize the need for cultural inclusion, awareness, and humility, there is still much work to be done to close the gaps that exist. It can also serve to facilitate action and response for future studies to support the face to face, qualitative research needed to explore the factors impacting the access of services for Black males.
Finally, the same can be said about the need to implement a more focused attention on serving populations of color, within the school of social work curricula.

Implications for Future Research and Social Work Practice

Currently there is a severe lack of research data available regarding this special population and the social problem that creates their plight. Very few data sources exist, primarily due to “real or perceived barriers to help-seeking. Some of the issues may relate to cultural attitudes, previous unsatisfactory contacts with professional caregivers, lack of trust in mental health professionals, issues of confidentiality, gender role socialization, a belief that nothing can help change the situation of distress, fears of negative repercussions such as being institutionalized, a lack of knowledge of the helping resources, and resources that are inaccessible or too costly” (Holden, McGregor, Blanks, & Mahaffey, 2012, p. 65). Although this may appear to be heavily related to the resistance, on the part of Black males, to access services, we must implore ourselves to consider why this resistance exists to begin with. It is imperative that face to face, qualitative studies be conducted, both Black males, and the social workers who provide services, in order to gain more insight into the dynamics of past interactions, assumptions and biases on both sides, and potential barriers that exist. Only when the answers are being sought directly from those who are being affected, will resolution be found.
Findings from this study show that even seasoned social workers are significantly unprepared to realistically and effectively address this social problem, and in order to do so, it will be imperative to, first, seek understanding; about the history and the plight of the Black male. In order to address and better serve this population, social work students need to be trained and prepared to properly engage with, and utilize psychosocial assessments to identify the real life issues impacting Black males; the most important of which is genuine engagement. This needs to be followed by culturally sensitive and empowering treatment modalities that not only recognize but also honor the client’s experience and culture, as just as important as the clinical skills and intervention brought by the social worker.

Conclusion

I am invisible. Misunderstood; simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or fragments of their imagination - indeed, everything and anything except me. - Ralph Ellison (1952)

Although limited in size, this study has lent itself to establish the possibility that the causal factors involved with the low level of motivation, by Black males, to seek helping services, particularly by social workers, may be due to a lack of knowledge about who social workers are, and how the services they provide may
improve their lives. It also is quite possible that this lack of knowledge also falls on the side of the social workers; not truly understanding the history and experience of the Black male, which limits their ability to engage with, and adequately serve this population. This brings forward the obvious need for additional research in order to bridge the gap, on both sides, through increased awareness, education, inclusion, and outreach.

Social workers are dedicated, driven and called to populations unseen or “invisible” to the greater society. While the role of the social worker is paramount in addressing the factors that impact the Black male and his family, “peer-reviewed social work in this area is difficult to acquire and consolidate. A search in Google on evidence of social work role’s in the lives of Black and/or African-American men suggests this area is under developed, as it generates sparse results” (Watkins, Hawkins, & Mitchell, 2015, p. 241). What is also mentioned by Watkins, Hawkins & Mitchell (2015), is that there is an “‘invisible presence of Black men in the social work research, policy and practice,” which has been reflected in previous literature dating back to 1999 (Watkins, Hawkins, & Mitchell, 2015, p. 246). If this recognition of “invisibility” among Black men has been in play since 1999, however there still appears to be a lack of research to address it, there is a definite problem, and implication for future research. Social workers must be willing to “look within examining their own concepts of privilege, experiences with racism, and underlying perceptions of themselves, in order to move along the continuum of culturally competent practice” (Loya, 2012, p. 31).
APPENDIX A

SURVEY / QUESTIONNAIRE
Understandings and Beliefs about Social Work Scale
Tavon A. Harris
10/27/2015

Section 1: What do I understand about social work?

➢ Circle one number for each question.

1. Social Workers must have a college degree.
   1 – I believe this
   2 – I do not believe this
   3 – I am undecided about this

2. Social Workers only work with children.
   1 – I believe this
   2 – I do not believe this
   3 – I am undecided about this

3. Social Workers only work with families with children.
   1 – I believe this
   2 – I do not believe this
   3 – I am undecided about this

4. Social Workers have a Code of Ethics that they must follow in their practice.
   1 – I believe this
   2 – I do not believe this
   3 – I am undecided about this

5. Like doctors and other licensed professionals, Social Workers are governed by a professional licensing board in the state where they practice.
   1 – I believe this
   2 – I do not believe this
   3 – I am undecided about this

Section 2: What do I believe about social workers?

1. I would be okay with receiving services from a social worker who does not share my ethnicity.
   1 – Strongly Agree
   2 – Agree
   3 – Somewhat Agree
   4 – Disagree
   5 – Strongly Disagree
2. Social Workers might be able to help me develop a positive attitude about myself as a black man.
   1 – Strongly Agree
   2 – Agree
   3 – Somewhat Agree
   4 – Disagree
   5 – Strongly Disagree

3. Social workers are invested in helping black male clients reduce shame about their need for help.
   1 – Strongly Agree
   2 – Agree
   3 – Somewhat Agree
   4 – Disagree
   5 – Strongly Disagree

4. Black males’ negative perceptions of social workers affect Black males’ willingness to seek their services.
   1 – Strongly Agree
   2 – Agree
   3 – Somewhat Agree
   4 – Disagree
   5 – Strongly Disagree

5. Other people’s opinions have largely determined how I feel about social workers.
   1 – Strongly Agree
   2 – Agree
   3 – Somewhat Agree
   4 – Disagree
   5 – Strongly Disagree

6. Because I’m not really sure how I feel, I’m looking for answers to my questions about what social workers offer.
   1 – Strongly Agree
   2 – Agree
   3 – Somewhat Agree
   4 – Disagree
   5 – Strongly Disagree

7. I know I should seek help to better my life, but I’d rather not think about it.
   1 – Strongly Agree

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8. Social work is an important and needed profession.

1 – Strongly Agree
2 – Agree
3 – Somewhat Agree
4 – Disagree
5 – Strongly Disagree

9. My family would support me seeking services from a social worker.

1 – Strongly Agree
2 – Agree
3 – Somewhat Agree
4 – Disagree
5 – Strongly Disagree

10. Social workers have positive things to offer me.

1 – Strongly Agree
2 – Agree
3 – Somewhat Agree
4 – Disagree
5 – Strongly Disagree

Section 3: What do I believe about how social workers see the clients they serve?

1. Social Workers understand and value the significance of the history associated with their clients, and consider it when providing services.

   1 – Strongly Agree
   2 – Agree
   3 – Somewhat Agree
   4 – Disagree
   5 – Strongly Disagree

2. Social workers understand and value the strength black males find in community and church.

   1 – Strongly Agree
   2 – Agree
   3 – Somewhat Agree
   4 – Disagree
   5 – Strongly Disagree
3. Social workers would willingly challenge stereotypes about black males.
   1 – Strongly Agree
   2 – Agree
   3 – Somewhat Agree
   4 – Disagree
   5 – Strongly Disagree

4. Social workers are invested in helping people without judging them.
   1 – Strongly Agree
   2 – Agree
   3 – Somewhat Agree
   4 – Disagree
   5 – Strongly Disagree

5. Social workers are advocates for black men like me.
   1 – Strongly Agree
   2 – Agree
   3 – Somewhat Agree
   4 – Disagree
   5 – Strongly Disagree

6. Hispanic Social workers are advocates for black men like me.
   1 – Strongly Agree
   2 – Agree
   3 – Somewhat Agree
   4 – Disagree
   5 – Strongly Disagree

7. Caucasian Social workers are advocates for black men like me.
   1 – Strongly Agree
   2 – Agree
   3 – Somewhat Agree
   4 – Disagree
   5 – Strongly Disagree

8. Asian Social workers are advocates for black men like me.
   1 – Strongly Agree
   2 – Agree
   3 – Somewhat Agree
   4 – Disagree
   5 – Strongly Disagree

9. African-American Social workers are advocates for black men like me.
   1 – Strongly Agree
2 – Agree
3 – Somewhat Agree
4 – Disagree
5 – Strongly Disagree

10. Social workers practice with the cultural norms and values of black men in mind.

1 – Strongly Agree
2 – Agree
3 – Somewhat Agree
4 – Disagree
5 – Strongly Disagree

11. Social workers have a realistic and reasonably accurate understanding of the plight of black men.

1 – Strongly Agree
2 – Agree
3 – Somewhat Agree
4 – Disagree
5 – Strongly Disagree

12. Social workers’ perceptions and beliefs about black males, are influenced by mainstream media.

1 – Strongly Agree
2 – Agree
3 – Somewhat Agree
4 – Disagree
5 – Strongly Disagree

13. Social Workers promote and practice within a solid code of ethics with all clients.

1 – Strongly Agree
2 – Agree
3 – Somewhat Agree
4 – Disagree
5 – Strongly Disagree

Section 4: Socio-Demographics

➢ Circle one number for each question.

1. Please indicate your current age:
   1) 18-29 years
   2) 30-54 years
3) 55+ years

2. Please verify your gender is male:
   1) Yes
   2) No

3. Please indicate your ethnicity:
   1) Black / African American
   3) Black / Latino
   4) Black / Non-Latino
   5) Black / Bi-racial: ___________________________
   6) Black / Other: ___________________________

4. Please indicate your level of education:
   1) No high school diploma or GED
   2) GED
   3) High School Diploma
   4) Some college
   5) Undergraduate Degree
   6) Graduate Degree

5. Please indicate income level:
   1) $0 - $24,999
   2) $25,000 - $49,999
   3) $50,000 - $74,999
   4) $75,000 - $99,999
   5) $100,000+

6. Please indicate your level of personal experience with accessing services offered by social workers:
   1) Directly receive or have received services
   2) Child of a parent who receives or has received services
   3) Sibling or a parent of an individual who receives or has received services
   4) Caretaker of a child or adult who receives or who has received services
   5) Friend of an individual who receives or has received services
   6) No personal experience with services offered by social workers.

7. Please indicate the length of your affiliation with social workers:
1) 10 years +
2) 7-9 years
3) 3-5 years
4) Less than 3 years
5) No previous affiliation with social workers

Developed by: Tavon Antonio Harris
APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT
Dear Participant -

I am writing to invite you to add your insight to an exploratory study about the beliefs of Black males about social workers. This study is being conducted by Tavon Harris for the purposes of my Masters of Social Work research project, and will be under the supervision of Dr. Herb Shon, MSW, LCSW, Ph.D. The results will be compiled, analyzed, and made available through the CSUSB PFAU Library for public view. The study will be approved by the School of Social Work sub-committee of the CSUSB Institutional Review Committee (IRB).

The purpose of this study is to explore the beliefs of Black males about social workers. If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to complete an online survey. This survey is expected to take approximately 10-15 minutes of your time, and your decision to participate is completely voluntary, with no consequences if you choose to decline or withdrawal at any time.

This survey includes no foreseen risks. Although the benefits of this study may not directly impact you, the hope is that the results will assist social work practitioners and educators to become more aware of the needs related to this topic. The survey and its responses will be kept completely confidential and no record will be made or saved that may be used to positively identify you as a participant. The anonymous surveys will only be reviewed by the researchers and results will be published on behalf of the entire group.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, you may contact Dr. Herb Shon by email at herb.shon@csusb.edu, 909-537-5532.
APPENDIX C

DEBRIEFING STATEMENT
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

Thank you very much for taking the time to participate in this survey. The survey you have just completed was an exploration of the beliefs of Black males about social workers. It was conducted for the purposes of my Masters of Social Work research project, and being done under the supervision of Dr. Herb Shon, MSW, LCSW, Ph.D. The results will be compiled, analyzed, and made available through the CSUSB PFAU Library for public view.

Your opinions are invaluable to the furthering of the social work profession, and the continued pursuit of cultural competence and humility. If you are interested in general information and/or have any questions about the current services available for Black males, you can visit the following websites:

2. MHA: Mental Health America:  
   [http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/african-american-mental-health](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/african-american-mental-health)
3. NAMI: National Alliance on Mental Illness:  [https://www.nami.org/](https://www.nami.org/)
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http://www.norc.org/Research/Topics/Pages/special-populations.aspx


