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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MENTAL HEALTH AND THE AFRICAN AMERICAN ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

Adelola Ige

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MENTAL HEALTH
AND THE AFRICAN AMERICAN ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

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
(Adelola Ige)
(May 2023)

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this case study is to gain a better understanding of the relationship between mental health and the academic experience of African American students pursuing higher education. This study also aims to determine how race-related mental health stressors negatively impact African American students' mental health outcomes and academic experience. The research questions that will be used in this study are designed to elicit participant viewpoints on specific issues which include microaggression and discrimination, social isolation, and mental health-related stigma. The overall findings of this study can help the social work practice to recognize contributing academic-related factors that negatively affect African American students' mental health.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	
PROBLEM FORMULATION	Error! Bookmark not defined.
PURPOSE OF THE STUDY	3
SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROJECT FOR SOCIAL WORK	4
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	
INTRODUCTION	5
MENTAL HEALTH STRESSORS FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS.....	5
MICROAGGRESSIONS AND DISCRIMINATION	6
SOCIAL ISOLATION AND LACK OF SOCIAL SUPPORT.....	6
STIGMA	7
SUMMARY.....	7
THEORY GUIDING CONCEPTUALIZATION	8
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS	
INTRODUCTION	9
STUDY DESIGN.....	10
SAMPLING	11
DATA COLLECTION AND INSTRUMENTS	11
PROCEDURES.....	12
PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS.....	13
DATA ANALYSIS.....	13
SUMMARY	14

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

INTRODUCTION 14

 DEMOGRAPHIC DATA 15

 RESEARCH QUESTION RESPONSES 17

 SUMMARY..... 23

CHAPTER FIVE: DISSCUSSION

INTRODUCTION 23

 DISCUSSION..... 24

 LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK
 PRACTICE 29

 SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE
 30

APPENDIX A: IRB APPLICATION 31

APPENDIX B: RESEARCH FLYER.....32

APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT 33

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....34

REFERENCES 35

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Problem Formulation

While in pursuit of higher education many African American students often experience different forms of mental health stressors during the process. Among the variety of mental health stressors that African American students may experience include microaggressions and discrimination, social isolation, and mental health-related stigma. In addition, race-related mental health stressors that African American students experience in the academic environment can result in poorer mental health outcomes (David R. Williams, 2019). Similarly, race-related mental health stressors have been positively associated with feelings of depression, anxiety, and psychological distress (David R. Williams, 2019). Furthermore, African American students often suffer in silence about their mental health and this can negatively impact their academic performance (Greta Anderson, 2020). Overall, due to the heightened presence of mental health stressors in the African American student population, there must be targeted efforts dedicated to assisting this community.

Throughout their higher education experience, a majority of African American students have been subject to various forms of microaggression and discrimination. In addition, an estimated 81% of African American students that have attended a higher education institution have reported facing race-related

discrimination (Monica Anderson, 2016). Similarly, an estimated 56% of African American students that have attended a higher education institution have reported experiences of people acting suspicious of them. (Monica Anderson, 2016). Moreover, an estimated 52% of African American students that have attended a higher education institution have reported experiences of people acting as if they were unintelligent. (Monica Anderson. 2016). Finally, the consequences of varying forms of microaggressions and discrimination can be detrimental to African American students' general mental health.

During their higher education experience, many African Americans students experience periods of feeling socially isolated or lacking social support. Similarly, it has been found that African American students attending majority-white institutions are more likely to report feelings of race-related stress and lower faculty support (Anderson, 2016). In addition, African American students that must overcome negative race-related stress have less emotional capacity to dedicate to typical student experiences such as maintaining personal relationships and social life (Anderson, 2020). Furthermore, African American students that experience neglect from their academic institutional leaders towards addressing race-related issues may become psychologically affected (Anderson, 2020). Lastly, the culminating experiences of social isolation and lack of social support can end up interfering with African American students' ability to achieve overall academic success.

In circumstances where African American students in higher education are experiencing mental health challenges, they often fear perceived stigma from their peers. Within the African American community, an estimated 63% of the population believe that a mental health condition is a sign of personal weakness (National Alliance on Mental Illness, 2022). Likewise, African American students may feel shame about having a mental illness and fear being discriminated against due to their condition (National Alliance on Mental Illness, 2022). Moreover, the attempted avoidance of these feelings could prevent African American students from seeking mental health services that they potentially need (National Alliance on Mental Illness, 2022). Ultimately, the consequences of non-utilization of mental health treatment due to perceived stigma can lead to even worse mental outcomes for African American students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify the relationship between mental health and the African American academic experience. This issue is of significant importance to the field of social work due to the continued academic-related mental health concerns of our African American higher education student population. Further research from this study will provide the social work practice with a better understanding of the effects of academic-related factors on overall African American mental health. The findings from this study will also add to current research related to mental health and the African American academic experience.

The overall research method that will be used in this study is a qualitative design and it will also utilize an in-depth interview with open-ended questions to collect information from subjects. The type of research that will also be conducted is exploratory due to the limited research on this topic from the perspective of social workers. The recruitment method for this study will be a convenience sample and participants will be able to select a set interview time to meet for their interview. The researcher will also ensure that all information provided will be secure and kept strictly confidential.

Significance of the Project for Social Work

The research findings from this study will positively impact the social work field, at the micro, mezzo, and macro level. At the micro-level, these findings will allow for a better understanding of the relationship between mental health challenges and academic experience in the African American community, as well as highlight the best approaches to address individual challenges. In addition, at the mezzo level, further research can lead to better-targeted community resources that are designed to combat the issue of mental health challenges that are correlated with a poor academic experience. Furthermore, at the macro level, specific advocacy efforts can be directed towards initiating social policy change and creating new government legislation. Finally, the research question that will be addressed as the result of this study is: What is the relationship between mental health and the African American academic experience?

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter will explore current research that focuses on the effects of race-related mental health stressors on African American students in higher education. In addition, this chapter will highlight African American students' experiences of varying forms of microaggressions and discrimination. Moreover, this chapter will also focus on the African American students' experiences of social isolation and lack of social support. Finally, this chapter will evaluate African American students' perspectives on the perceived stigma associated with the use of mental health services.

Mental Health Stressors for African American Students

African American students in higher education, often experience a variety of mental health stressors which include microaggressions and discrimination, social isolation, and mental health-related stigma. In terms of microaggressions and discrimination, African American students are typically more likely to characterize campus climate as hostile, disrespectful, and less accepting than other ethnic groups (Soto et al., 2016). In regards to social isolation and lack of social support, African American students are also more likely to express feelings of isolation and discrimination from their peers in the academic setting (Anderson et al., 2013). Furthermore, stigma related to mental illness continues to be a significant barrier for African Americans to seek mental health care (Kawaii-

Bogue et al., 2017). Lastly, this review will seek to gain further understanding of the different factors that affect African American students' overall mental health and academic experience to encourage more awareness, research, and target solutions for these students.

Microaggressions and Discrimination

In terms of microaggressions and discrimination, African American students are more likely to express negative experiences in the academic setting. In addition, African American students are more likely to report experiences of a racially insensitive climate and discrimination than other ethnic groups (Soto et al., 2016). Similarly, African American students who attend majority-white academic institutions often must navigate an environment in which their presence on campus may be scrutinized and abilities may be doubted (Soto et al., 2016). Moreover, African American students' perceptions of prejudice and racial hostility on campus are linked to higher levels of anxiety, depression, and loneliness (Soto et al., 2016). Finally, having to deal with microaggressions and discrimination can lead to worse academic performance for African American students.

Social Isolation and Lack of Social Support

In regards to social isolation and lack of social support, African American students often experience difficulty socially adjusting to their surrounding academic environment. In addition, African American students often reported feelings of anxiety and discomfort due to having to acclimate into a community

that may be unprepared or unwilling to accept them (Soto et al., 2016). Likewise, African American students reported that they felt personally diminished when other ethnic groups were uncomfortable around them because of the negative assumptions held about their race (Anderson et al., 2013). Furthermore, African American students also reported feelings of invisibility that are related to the lack of diversity in their academic surroundings (Baker, 2013). Lastly, feelings of social isolation and lack of social support can result in an unpleasant academic experience for African American students.

Stigma

As far as perceived mental health stigma, it often causes African American students to avoid seeking treatment for their mental health challenges. In addition, African American students typically held more stigmatizing beliefs about mental illness than other ethnic groups (Barksdale & Molock, 2008). Similarly, African American students were more likely to feel a high level of embarrassment related to having mental health challenges and seeking treatment (DeFreitas, 2018). Moreover, African American students often reported concern about peer rejection and ridicule if it were revealed that mental health services were being used (Barksdale & Molock, 2008). Finally, perceived mental health stigma can prevent African American students from receiving effective treatment for their mental health concerns.

Summary

This chapter will evaluate current research that focuses on the effects of race-related mental health stressors on African American students pursuing higher education. The different types of mental health stressors that African American students typically experience include microaggressions and discrimination, social isolation, and mental health-related stigma. These mental health stressors can also greatly impact African American students' overall academic experience. Furthermore, unaddressed mental health concerns can result in even worse mental health outcomes for African American students. Finally, this study will seek to gain further knowledge on various academic factors that affect African American students' overall mental health to promote greater awareness, research, and target solutions for these students.

Theory Guiding Conceptualization

The theory that will be used to guide conceptualization for this study is the Ecological Systems Model. This model was established by Urie Bronfenbrenner in 1979 to better evaluate the complex nature of the interactions between the various elements in an individual's environment (Guy-Evans, 2020). The proposed model consists of five systems which include the Microsystem, Mesosystem, Exosystem, Macrosystem, and Chronosystem (Guy-Evans, 2020). These different systems focus on a specific area within an individual's life which are the Microsystem (Individual Level), Mesosystem (School/Family Level), Exosystem (Community Level), Macrosystem (Culture/Policy Level), and the Chronosystem (Life Stage/Transition Level) (Guy-Evans, 2020). Using the

Ecological Systems Model perspective as a conceptual guide in this study it will allow the researcher to consider what environmental and social aspects may influence African American students' mental health.

The Ecological Systems Model will be specifically used to evaluate the mental health stressors that African American students experience which include microaggressions and discrimination, social isolation, and mental health-related stigma. In terms of microaggressions and discrimination, this issue applies to the Mesosystem level of this model due to negative experiences that occur in the school environment for African American students. In regards to social isolation, this issue also applies to the Mesosystem level of this model due lack of social support in the academic setting for African American students. Moreover, the issue of mental health-related stigma applies to the Exosystem of this model due to cultural expectations and beliefs held in African American students' community. Ultimately, using the Ecological Systems Model will help to provide a greater perspective on the varying influences that African American experience while pursuing higher education.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

This study aims to determine the relationship between mental health and the African American academic experience. This chapter will further provide details on how this research study will be conducted and explain the reasoning for the techniques applied. The sections that will be discussed are the study design, sampling, data collection and instruments, procedures, protection of human subjects, and data analysis.

Study Design

The purpose of this study is to identify the relationship between mental health and the African American academic experience. The type of research that will be conducted is exploratory due to the limited research on this topic from the perspective of social workers. This study will also be a qualitative study that will utilize an in-depth interview with open-ended questions to collect information from subjects.

An advantage of using a qualitative approach is that this method allows for participants to be able to describe their personal experiences in-depth. It will also allow each participant to highlight key details, observations, ideas, and insights that will further enhance the research study. A qualitative approach will also increase the reliability of the study due to the use of open-ended questions which do not restrict participant responses.

A disadvantage of using a qualitative approach is that this method is more intrusive and it requires a set time commitment for each participant to be able to

conduct an individual interview. This may make participants feel less comfortable disclosing their true thoughts and feelings and can discourage overall participation in the research study. A qualitative approach also does not provide statistically representative or measurable data and instead relies solely on personal perspectives.

The overall study will seek to answer three basic questions which are: 1) What are African American students' experiences related to microaggressions and discrimination in the academic environment? 2) What are African American students' experiences related to social isolation and lack of social support in the academic environment? 3) What are African American students' perceptions of stigma associated with receiving mental health services?

Sampling

This study will utilize a non-random purposive sample of African American students which is representative of the study's target population. The participants will also consist specifically of African American students who are currently pursuing higher education within the United States. There will also be a total of 10 subjects that will be participating in the in-depth interview.

Data Collection and Instruments

The qualitative data in this study will be collected through a recorded virtual interview via Zoom in July 2022. Participants will be recruited through an

Instagram posting that provides general information on the study after providing acceptance. All participants' interviews will begin with an introduction and a general description of the study's purpose. Demographic information of participants will be collected before the start of each interview. This information will include the participants' age, gender, achieved education level, G.P.A., school status, and employment status.

The researcher will ask participants to describe how their academic experience as an African American student has affected their overall mental health. The researcher will seek to determine this information through the use of the interview guideline located in Appendix D. During the interview, the researcher will use a combination of furthering responses and probing questions to explore and expand on participants' statements if needed. The researcher will also take steps to ensure that each participant feels comfortable sharing their personal experiences throughout their interview process.

Procedures

For the study, participants will be able to select a preferred time slot using the provided link from Google Calendar. The researcher will begin the interview by explaining the purpose and goals of the study to the participants. After the brief explanation, the researcher will continue by discussing the rules and limits of confidentiality and provide informed consent of the risks and benefits of participating in this study. The researcher will then collect demographic

information and signed consent through requested written documents which will be sent out to participants via email. The researcher will finally proceed by allowing participants to ask questions or express any concerns that they may have related to the study.

During each participant's interview, the audio recording device will be turned on after receiving verbal consent to record the contents of the meeting. The duration of each interview will be expected to last approximately 30 to 45 minutes. At the closing of each interview, participants will be thanked for their participation and receive a \$10 gift card to demonstrate appreciation for their contributions to the study.

Protection of Human Subjects

The confidentiality and privacy of all participants will be protected during and after the completion of this study. All interviews will occur in private rooms and the doors will remain closed throughout the meeting. Each participant will also be required to read, complete, and sign an emailed consent form which can be found in (Appendix C) before conducting the interview. All audio recordings and documentation will be stored on the cloud with password protection. After three years following the completion of the study, all recordings and documentation will be deleted from the cloud.

Data Analysis

All data gathered during the interview will be reviewed and analyzed using thematic analysis. The audio recordings from the interview will also be transcribed into written form and non-verbal actions will be documented. These statements will be assigned a code that summarizes the information using an open-coding approach and entered into an excel document under the corresponding code. The statements will then be divided into different categories and sorted into major and general themes.

Summary

This chapter will examine the relationship between mental health and the African American academic experience. The study will proceed to obtain relevant information through the use of in-depth interviews of participants. These interviews will invite participants to express their unique viewpoints about their mental health and academic experience. The overall study will also be conducted by using a qualitative research approach and all information provided will be kept confidential and secure.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

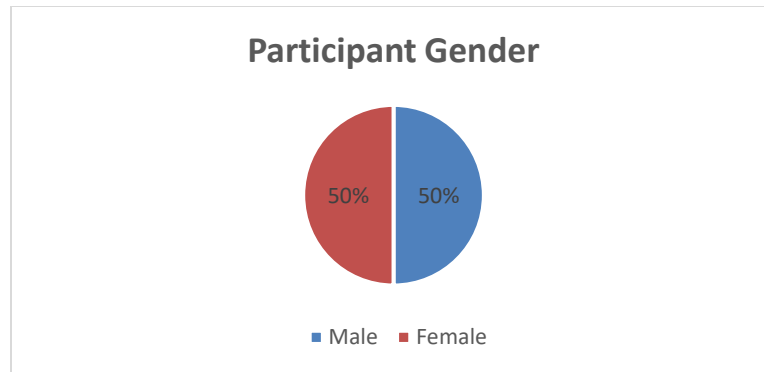
Introduction

This chapter reviews the results of this qualitative research study which will evaluate the relationship between mental health and the African American academic experience. In addition, participants provided their demographic data and responses to each research question. During this research study, the interviewer collected this information from a total of ten participants within a two-week period. Furthermore, the following sections will describe the participants' demographic data and research question responses.

Demographic Data

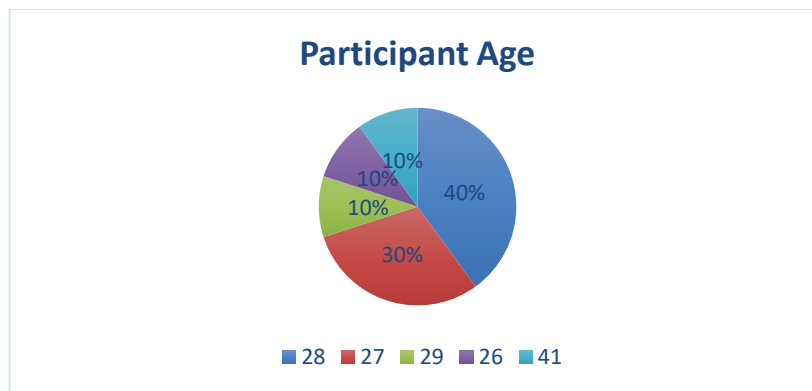
This section of the chapter will focus on describing the participants in this study's demographic data. In terms of Figure 1: Participant Gender, it reflects that among the ten participants in this study 50% (Identified as Male) and 50% (Identified as Female). In regards to Figure 2: Participant Age, it reflects that among the ten participants in this study their ages were 40% (28 years old), 30% (27 Years old), 10% (29 Years old), 10% (26 Years old), and 10% (41 years old). In relation to Figure 3: Participant Level of Education, it reflects that among the ten participants in this study, they attended 80% (Doctorate program) and 20% (Master's program). Lastly, Figure 4: Participant GPA, it reflects that among the ten participants, their GPAs were as follows 50% (3.5 to 4.0), 30% (3.0-3.49), 10% (2.5-2.99), and 10% (N/A or Not provided).

Figure 1: Participant Gender



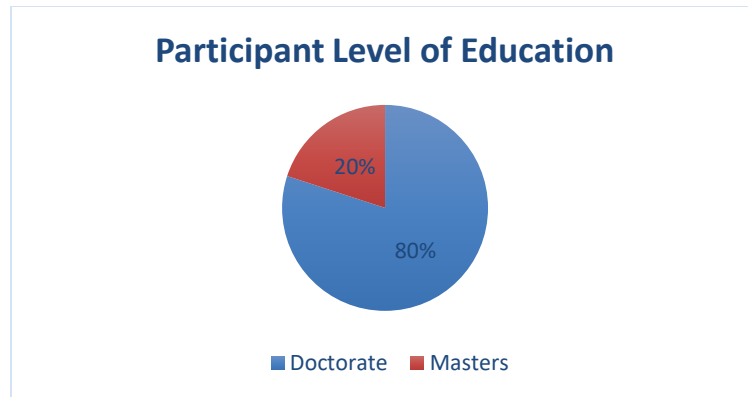
This pie graph describes the participant gender breakdown for this research study.

Figure 2: Participant Age



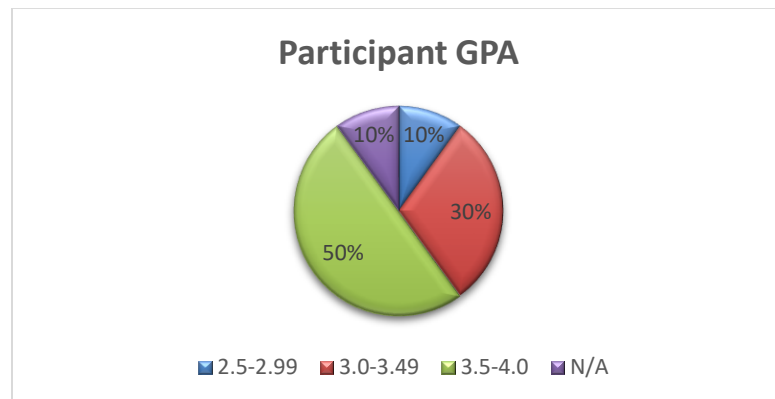
This pie graph describes the participant age breakdown for this research study.

Figure 3: Participant Level of Education



This pie graph describes the participant level of education breakdown for this research study.

Figure 4: Participant GPA



This pie graph describes the participant GPA breakdown for this research study.

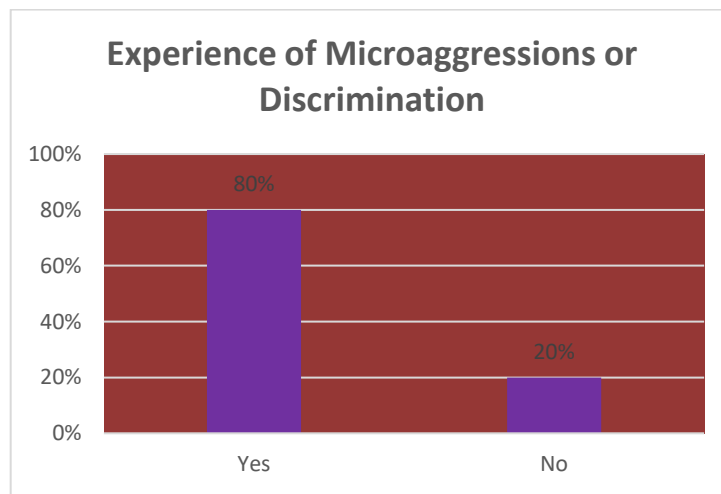
Research Question Responses

This section of the chapter will focus on describing the participants in this study's research question responses. In terms of Figure 5: Experience of Microaggressions or Discrimination, the ten participants in this study stated that

80% (Yes/they have) and 20% (No/they have not) experienced microaggressions or aggressions as an African American student. In regards to Figure 6: Experience of Mental Challenges, the ten participants in this study stated that 50% (Yes/they have) and 50% (No/they have not) experienced mental challenges as an African American student. In relation to Figure 7: Experience of Social Isolation, the ten participants in this study stated that 70% (Yes/they have) and 30% (No/they have not) experienced social isolation as an African American student. In reference to Figure 8: Level of Academic Support Received, the ten participants in this study stated that the level of academic support received was 60% (High), 20% (Moderate), and 20% (Low) as an African American student. As far as Figure 9: Level of Social Support Received, the ten participants in this study stated that the level of social support received was 60% (High), 0% (Moderate), and 40% (Low) as an African American student. Similarly, in Figure 10: Perceived Stigma of Mental Health Services, the ten participants in this study stated that the perceived stigma of mental health services in the African American community was 30% (People See it as Weak), 10% (Do not know it is needed), 10% (None/Not too many), 20% (People Think You Are Crazy), 10% (People Want to Avoid Being Judged), 10% (People Lack Trust), 10% (People Want to Maintain Privacy). Moreover, in Figure 11: Openness to Seeking Mental Health Services, the ten participants in this study stated that 80% (Yes/they would) and 20% (No/they would not) are open to seeking mental health services. Finally, in Figure 12: Suggestions for Higher Education Institutions, the ten

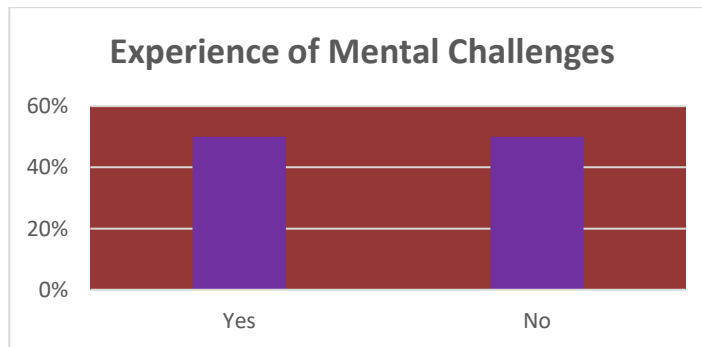
participants in this study stated that their suggestions for higher education institutions to better support African American students were 30% (Having Mental Health Forums), 20% (Having a Mental Health Course Requirement, 10% (Increased Faculty Representation), 20% (Having More Mental Health Education), 20% (Having Mental Health Halls/Conferences/Events).

Figure 5: Experience of Microaggressions or Discrimination



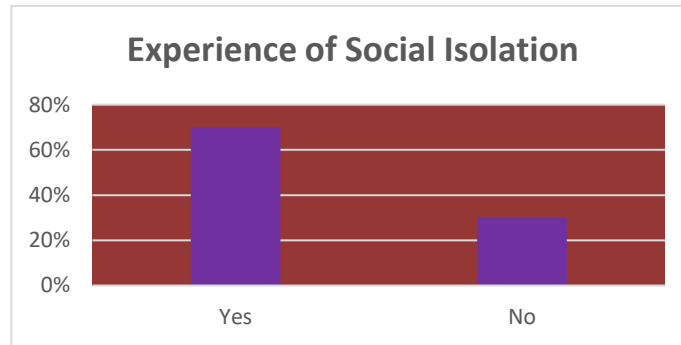
This bar graph describes participant experience of microaggression or discrimination for this research study.

Figure 6: Experience of Mental Challenges



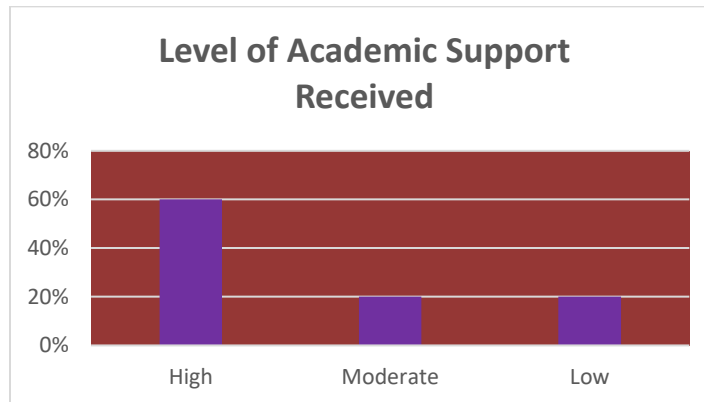
This bar graph describes participant experience of mental challenges for this research study.

Figure 7: Experience of Social Isolation



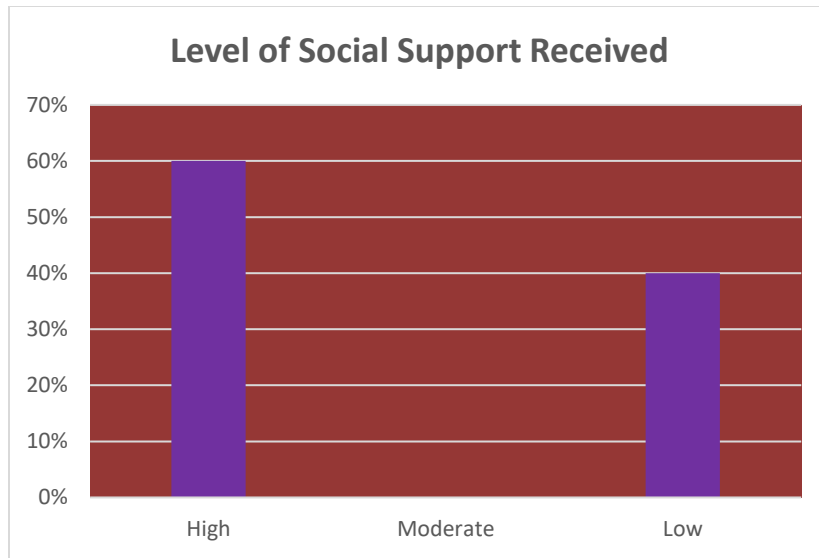
This bar graph describes participant experience of social isolation for this research study.

Figure 8: Level of Academic Support Received



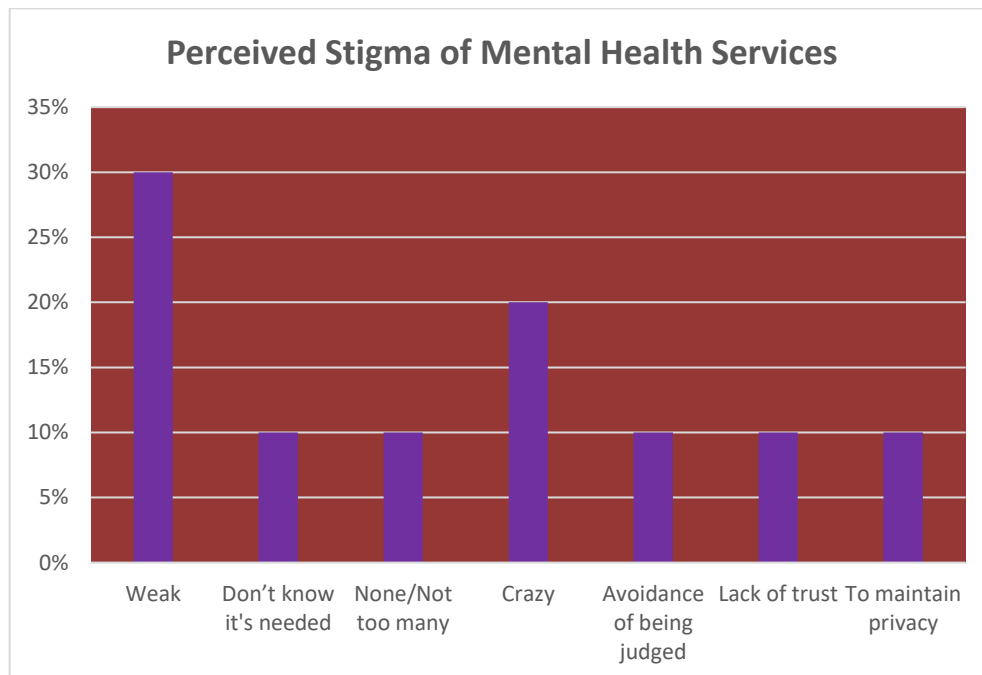
This bar graph describes participant level of academic support received for this research study.

Figure 9: Level of Social Support Received



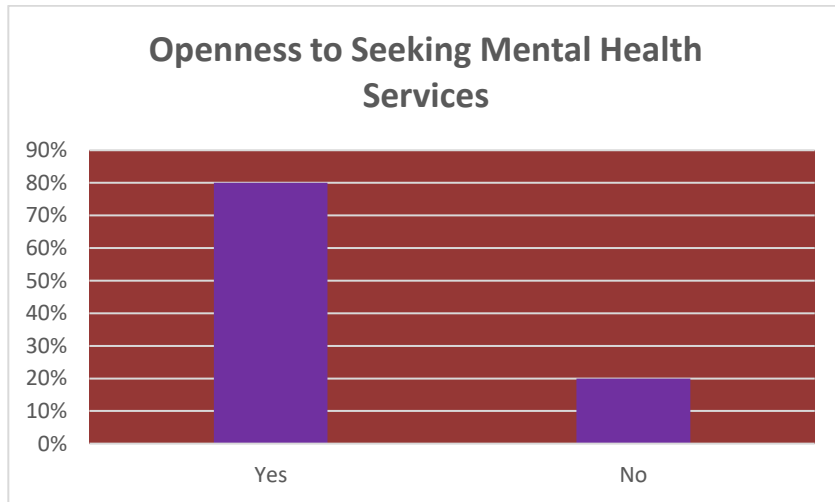
This bar graph describes participant level of social support received for this research study.

Figure 10: Perceived Stigma of Mental Health Services



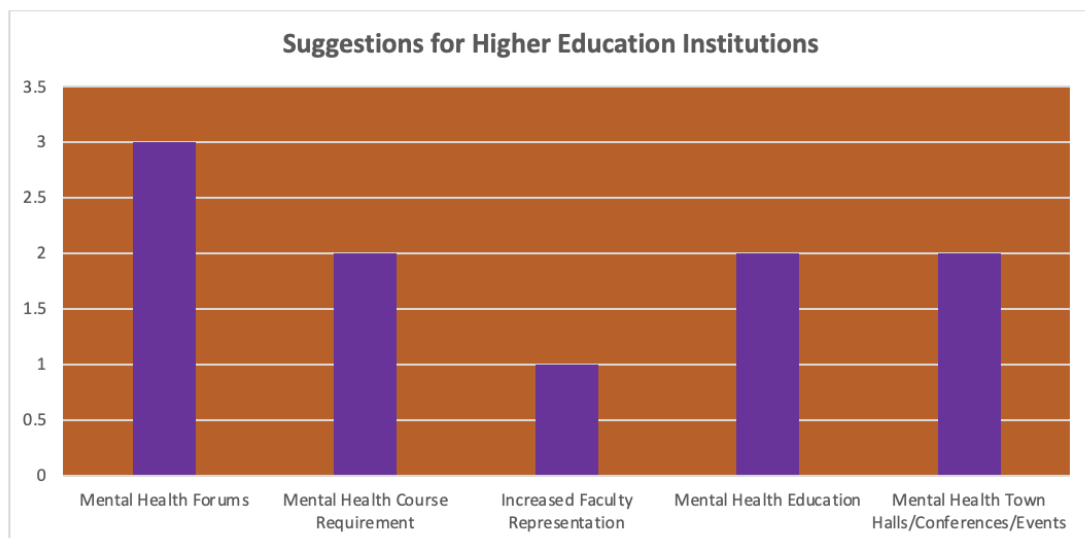
This bar graph describes participant perceived stigma of mental health services for this research study.

Figure 11: Openness to Seeking Mental Health Services



This bar graph describes participant openness to seeking mental health services for this research study.

Figure 12: Suggestions for Higher Education Institutions



This bar graph describes participant suggestion for higher education institutions to better support African American students for this research study.

Summary

This chapter reviewed the results of this qualitative research study which evaluated the relationship between mental health and the African American academic experience. In addition, participants were asked to provide their demographic data and responses to each research question. Throughout this research study, the interviewer collected this information from a total of ten participants within a two-week period. Lastly, the information provided by participants in this chapter will be further analyzed later in the study.

CHAPTER FIVE DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter further discusses the results of this qualitative research study which seeks to evaluate the relationship between mental health and the African American academic experience. The qualitative findings based on the ten participants individual responses will be the focus of this chapter and help to provide more insight into this specific topic. This chapter will also determine if the

findings from this study connects with current research related to this topic. Furthermore, this chapter will discuss the present limitations of this study, provide potential recommendations, and describe the implications of findings on the social work practice.

Discussion

The first interview question prompted participants to share whether they have experienced any forms of microaggressions and discrimination while attending their higher education institutions. In addition, the results of this study found that when it comes to microaggressions and discrimination 80% of participants (Stated-Yes) and 20% of participants (Stated-No) they have had this experience. Similarly, these results reflect that microaggressions and discrimination continue to be a significant problem that affects a major portion of African American students pursuing higher education. Moreover, current research on this topic states that microaggressions towards targeted racial or ethnic groups such as African Americans are persistent and occur frequently in academic settings (Williams et al., 2020). Finally, based on the information gathered from this study, it does appear to support current research findings related to this topic.

The second interview question prompted participants to share where they have experienced mental challenges related to their race or ethnic background and due to attending their higher education institutions. In addition, the results of

this study found that 50% of participants (Stated-Yes) and 50% of participants (Stated-No) they have had this experience. Similarly, these results reflect that mental health challenges relating to race or ethnic background continue to be a significant problem that affects a considerable portion of African American students pursuing higher education. Moreover, current research on this topic states that multiple studies have indicated that there is a significant association between experiencing microaggressions and higher levels of depression, anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms, impaired psychological wellbeing, and decreased self-esteem (Williams et al., 2020). Finally, based on the information gathered from this study, it does appear to support current research findings related to this topic.

The third interview question prompted participants to share whether they have ever felt socially isolated while attending their higher education institutions. In addition, the results of this study found that 70% of participants (Stated-Yes) and 30% of participants (Stated-No) they have had this experience. Similarly, these results reflect that social isolation continues to be a significant problem that affects a major portion of African American students pursuing higher education. Moreover, current research on this topic states that African American students at predominately white institutions (PWIs) often spend a lot of energy and time dealing with feelings of alienation and frustration from their campus environment (Campbell et al., 2019). Finally, based on the information gathered from this study, it does appear to support current research findings related to this topic.

The fourth interview question prompted participants to share the level of academic support they have received from institutional leaders as African American students. In addition, the results of this study found that 60% of participants (Stated-High), and 20% of participants (Stated-Moderate) and 20% of participants (Stated-Low) when asked to describe the level of academic support they received from institutional leaders. Similarly, these results reflect that a major portion of African American students believe they have received high and moderate levels of academic support while pursuing higher education. Moreover, current research on this topic states that African American students who pursue higher education are often underserved and underrepresented, compared to undergraduate students enrolled in the same disciplines (Campbell et al., 2019). Finally, based on the information gathered from this study, it does not appear to support current research findings related to this topic.

The fifth interview question prompted participants to share the level of social support they have received from school peers as African American students. In addition, the results of this study found that 60% of participants (Stated-High) and 0% of participants (Stated-Moderate), and 40% of participants (Stated-Low) when asked to describe the level of academic support they received from institutional leaders. Similarly, these results reflect that a considerable portion of African American students believe they have received low levels of academic support while pursuing higher education. Moreover, current research on this topic states that African Americans at PWIs often had to work

harder to negotiate between academic and social demands due to lack of support (Campbell et al., 2019). Finally, based on the information gathered from this study, it does appear to relatively support current research findings related to this topic.

The sixth interview question prompted participants to share thoughts on the perceived stigma associated with receiving mental health services in the African American student population. In addition, the results of this study found that the perceived stigma associated with mental health were as follows 30% of participants (Stated-People See it as Weak), 10% of participants (Stated-Do not know it is needed), 10% of participants (Stated-None/Not too many), 20% of participants (Stated-People Think You Are Crazy), 10% of participants (Stated-People Want to Avoid Being Judged), 10% of participants (Stated-People Lack Trust), 10% of participants (Stated-People Want to Maintain Privacy). Similarly, these results reflect that a majority of African American students believe that there is a high amount of negative stigma associated with receiving mental health services in their community. Moreover, current research on this topic states that within the African American community there is often a fear of experiencing stigma, judgment, and being considered crazy among social peers (Mental Health America, 2023). Finally, based on the information gathered from this study, it does appear to support current research findings related to this topic.

The seventh interview question prompted participants to share if they would personally seek mental health services if available and during a situation

where they needed additional emotional support. In addition, the results of this study found that when it comes to seeking mental health services 80% of participants (Stated-Yes/they would) and 20% of participants (Stated-No/they would not). Similarly, these results reflect that a majority of African American students would be open to pursuing mental health services if needed. Moreover, current research on this topic states that African Americans often held strong beliefs related to stigma, psychological openness, and help-seeking which negatively influenced their coping behaviors and willingness to seek treatment (Mental Health America, 2023). Finally, based on the information gathered from this study, it does not appear to support current research findings related to this topic.

The eighth interview question prompted participants to share their suggestions for higher education institutions to be able to better support African American students. In addition, the results of this study found that when it comes to suggestions for higher education institutions to better support African American students 30% of participants (Stated-Having Mental Health Forums), 20% of participants (Stated-Having a Mental Health Course Requirement, 10% of participants (Stated-Increased Faculty Representation), 20% of participants (Stated-Having More Mental Health Education), 20% of participants (Stated-Having Mental Health Halls/Conferences/Events). Similarly, the results of this study proceed to highlight the many different ways institutions can actively work toward supporting African American students pursuing higher education.

Moreover, current research on this topic states that the results of longitudinal studies suggest that targeted institutional actions such as early and frequent interventions may reinforce positive perceptions and increase satisfaction for African American students (Campbell et al., 2019). Finally, based on the information gathered from this study, it does appear to support current research findings related to this topic.

Limitations and Recommendations for Social Work Practice

While conducting this research study, there were certain limitations present throughout the process. The first limitation of this study is that all interviews were solely held via zoom, which may have caused participants to give less engaging responses. The second limitation of this study is that it was primarily performed during a relatively short period and directly after the Covid-19 pandemic, which may have affected participants' responses. The third limitation of this study is that given the lack of resources, responses were collected from a small pool of participants, and therefore results may not be generalizable nationwide. The fourth limitation of this study is that it is considered a convenience sample due to the researcher's lack of ability to conduct research outside of geographical location and personal social network, and therefore results may also not be generalizable nationwide. Lastly, my recommendation for future research relating to this topic is that more extensive investment is granted toward funding a research study which will allow for in-person interviews,

prolonged study duration, expanded participant pool, and ability to fully account for diverse experiences.

Summary and Implications for Social Work Practice

Overall, this research study was able to provide significant insight into the evaluation of the relationship between mental health and the African American academic experience. Throughout the interview process, participants were also given the opportunity to describe their experiences in higher education and how it has affected their mental health. In addition, this study demonstrates that special efforts by higher education institutions are needed to sufficiently address prevalent concerns for African American students which include microaggressions and discrimination, mental challenges, social isolation, and stigma. Similarly, this study also demonstrates that higher education institutions seem to be doing a relatively good job of providing social and academic support for African American students. Furthermore, the general implications of this research study on the social work practice are that it brings more awareness of challenges that African American students continue to face while pursuing higher education and allows us as social workers to advocate and work towards minimizing harmful effects for our clients.

APPENDIX A: IRB APPLICATION

Date: 5-13-2022

IRB #: IRB-FY2022-259

Title: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MENTAL HEALTH AND THE AFRICAN AMERICAN ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

Creation Date: 3-1-2022

End Date:

Status: Unsubmitted

Principal Investigator: Laurie Smith

Review Board:

Sponsor:

Study History

Submission Type	Initial	Review Type	Unassigned	Decision
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Key Study Contacts

Member Adelola Ige	Role Co-Principal Investigator	Contact 007725062@coyote.csusb.edu
Member Laurie Smith	Role Principal Investigator	Contact lasmith@csusb.edu
Member Laurie Smith	Role Primary Contact	Contact lasmith@csusb.edu

APPENDIX B:
RESEARCH FLYER



Purpose of the Research: The purpose of this research study is to understand the relationship between mental health and the African American academic experience.

Eligibility criteria for participant: African American students in higher education.

Time commitment of the participants: Maximum time commitment is 45 minutes.

Location of the research: The individual interview will be held via Zoom.

Contact Information

Researcher Name: Lola Ige

Research Supervisor: Erik Schott

Researcher Phone Number: (818) 425-5126

Research Supervisor Phone Number: (909) 527-5507

Researcher Email: Adelolaige@gmail.com

Research Supervisor Email: Erik.Schott@csusb.edu

***Participants will receive a \$10 gift card after participating in the study**

***Please feel free to contact Lola Ige for further information!**

This study has been approved by the CSUSB IRB NUMBER: IRB-FY2022-259

APPENDIX C:
INFORMED CONSENT
INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are asked to participate is designed to examine the relationship between mental health and the African American academic experience in the United States. The study is being conducted by Adelola Ige, a graduate student, under the supervision of Dr. Smith, Professor in the School of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB). This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at CSUSB.

PURPOSE: The purpose of the study is to determine the relationship between mental health and the African American academic experience.

DESCRIPTION: Participants will be asked questions related to their academic experience as African American students and how it has affected their mental health.

PARTICIPATION: Your participation in the study is voluntary and you can discontinue participation in the study at any time without any consequences.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Your responses will remain confidential and data will be protected during and after the completion of this study. All interviews will occur in private rooms and the doors will remain closed throughout the meeting. Interview audio recordings and documentation will be stored on the cloud with password protection and deleted three years following the study.

DURATION: It will take no longer than 45 minutes to conduct the interview.

RISKS: Although not anticipated, there may be some feelings of discomfort when having to answer certain questions. You are not required to answer any provided questions and can end your participation at any time.

BENEFITS: There will not be any direct benefits from this study, however, the research findings will further contribute to published knowledge related to this topic.

CONTACT: If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Smith at (909) 537-3837.

RESULTS: Results of the study can be reviewed from the Pfau Library ScholarWorks database (<http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/>) at California State University, San Bernardino after July 2023. *****I agree to have this interview be audio recorded: _____ YES _____ NO

I understand that I must be 18 years of age or older to participate in this study, have read and understood the consent document, and agree to participate in the study.

Place an X mark here

Date

Appendix D: Research Questions

Research interview questions

1. Have you experienced any forms of microaggressions and discrimination while attending your higher education institution and if so, can you please describe that experience?
2. Have you ever experienced mental challenges related to your race or ethnic background and while attending your higher education institution and if so, can you please describe that experience?
3. Have you ever felt socially isolated while attending your higher education institution and if so, can you please describe that experience?
4. Can you describe the level of academic support that you believe that you have received from institutional leaders as an African American student?
5. Can you describe the level of social support that you believe that you have received from school peers as an African American student?
6. Can you describe what you believe is the perceived stigma associated with receiving mental health services in the African American student population?
7. Would you personally seek mental health services if available, and during a situation where you needed the additional emotional support, and please explain your reasoning?
8. Can you provide any suggestions for higher education institutions to be able to better support African American students?

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