Improving Access to Mental Health Services Among Black Youth in Hamilton, Ontario

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Initiative

What is it?

•This initiative sought to address barriers Black youth face in accessing mental health services in Hamilton.

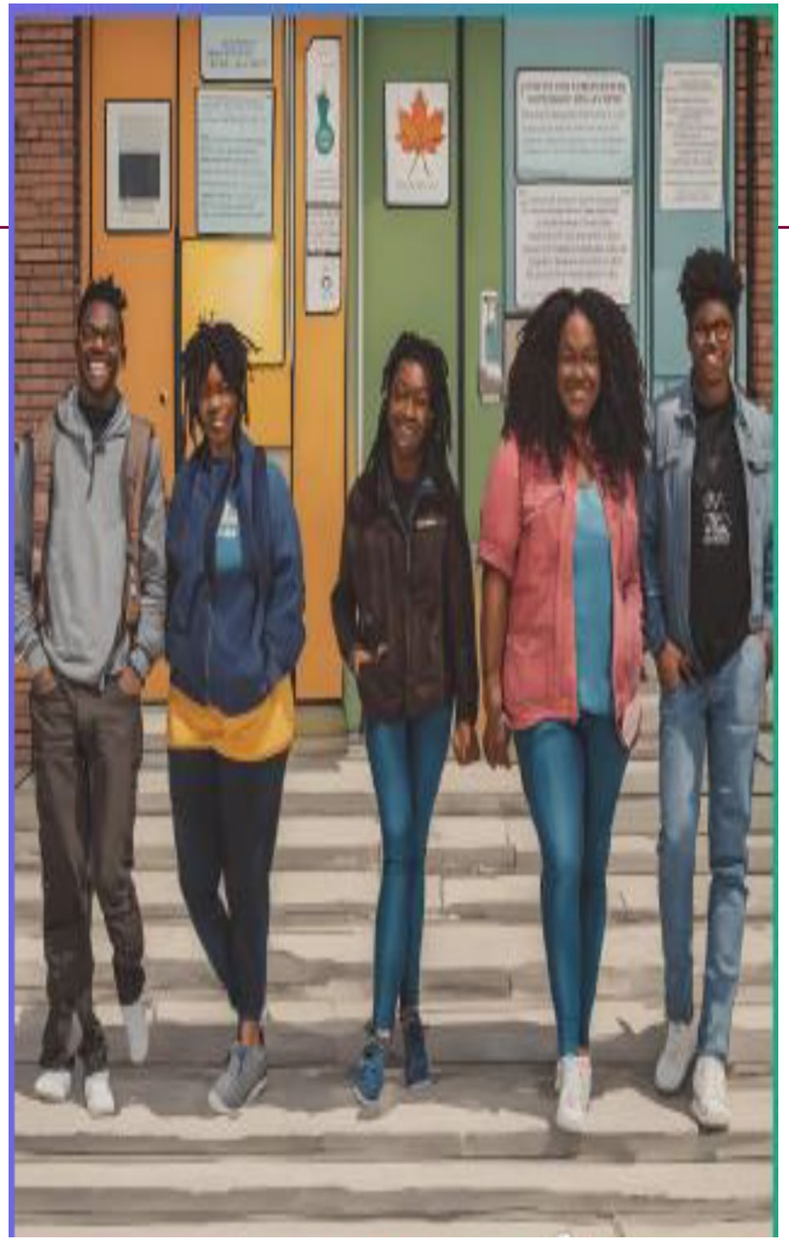
• 50 Black youth were interviewed to capture their diverse challenges with accessing mental health services.

Why should people care?

• Over 20% of Canadian youth face mental health challenges, and more than 75% do not receive the specialized care they need.

• This gap is deeper for Black youth in Hamilton, where Blacks make up 3.8% of the population.

• Barriers such as cost, stigma, and long wait times contribute to limited, lower-quality care.



Outcomes

Key Outcomes from the Research Initiative

Five major themes were identified:

1

- **NAVIGATING MENTAL HEALTH AND OTHER SERVICES IN HAMILTON:**
  Participants highlighted the need to normalize seeking therapy, eliminate barriers, and provide culturally sensitive and inclusive services.

"So, I think we need to normalize seeking therapy. It should be normalized so that someone wouldn't feel being judged. Then we should eliminate the barriers so that mental health seeking is made accessible, affordable, and very available... should be culturally sensitive and inclusive." (Participant 113)

2

- **REFLECTION ON SERVICES OUTSIDE OF HAMILTON:**
  Positive experiences with culturally similar healthcare providers were noted, but finding such providers was challenging.

"Because the doctor there was very friendly. And he was black." (Participant 111)

"But even the search to find someone that I felt comfortable with was hard, \ just for the fact that I am a Black woman, and I cannot see a White person or even a White man for help. And even when I did find a Black person, the wait lists were so long. (participant 009)

3

- **MAKING SENSE OF MENTAL HEALTH DISCOURSES:**
  Discrimination contributes to stress, anxiety, and feelings of helplessness and hopelessness.

"Some of them come with discrimination against the Black... you tend to get stressed, anxiety...it also contributes to you feel helpless, hopeless, and sometimes you just get sad." (Participant 093)

Key Outcomes from the Research Initiative (contd)

4

- **EXPERIENCES DEALING WITH MENTAL HEALTH IN HAMILTON:**
  Shame, lack of access to services, and feeling unwelcome were significant barriers.

"Yeah, mainly shame, lack of access, and lack of knowledge...And just feeling unwelcomed. And like you wouldn't have access to those things." (Participant 002)

5

- **CONSTRUCTING EXPERIENCES WITH MENTAL HEALTH:**
  Being Black can lead to low self-esteem and heartbreak due to societal attitudes.

"I know being black sometimes is a very hard thing to deal with. You know, it makes you go with like low self-esteem...you hear so many people talk about so many things...leaving you heartbroken with having it in mind that what if you were not Black." (Participant 109)

This Research initiative strengthened community-academic collaboration through engagement with Empowerment Squared and community stakeholders.

Lessons learned, best practices

Lessons Learned:

•Black youth face unique mental health challenges shaped by racism, culture, and systemic exclusion.

•Help-seeking is influenced by stigma, mistrust, cost, and lack of culturally appropriate services.

Best Practices:

•Engage youth as co-researchers to ensure authenticity and trust.

•Partner with Black-led organizations for recruitment and dissemination.

•Use narrative approaches to honor lived experiences and social context.

•Develop policies that address structural vulnerabilities, not just symptoms.