

## Black American Psychological Help-Seeking Intention: An Integrated Literature Review With Recommendations for Clinical Practice

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Cumulative research has indicated that Black Americans underutilize voluntary mental health services. This review article adopts the theory of planned behavior (TPB; Ajzen, 1991) model as an organizing conceptual framework to demonstrate how a variety of factors contribute to Black Americans' reluctance to seek psychological help. These factors include perceived negative consequences associated with seeking help (i.e., mental illness stigma); social pressure against psychological help-seeking (i.e., endorsement of beliefs, such as "Black people do not get mental illness," "Black people must be strong," and/or "Black people who seek professional help have less faith in God"); and perceived difficulties associated with seeking professional help (e.g., cultural mistrust, microaggressions in therapy). This article then suggests approaches that practitioners can use to encourage mental health service use in this population, such as reducing mental illness stigma through psychoeducation; discussing the influences of race/ethnicity and culture in therapy; and preventing and addressing microaggressions in therapy. Finally, the article discusses directions for future research to further investigate how to better understand and encourage psychological help-seeking intention in the Black community.

**Keywords:** Black Americans, African Americans, psychological help-seeking, mental health services use, theory of planned behavior

Although mental illness affects everyone, regardless of race or ethnicity, Black Americans<sup>1</sup> in the United States (U.S.) use mental health services less than other racial/ethnic groups (e.g., Cummings & Druss, 2011; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2015). Similarly, in Canada, the Center for Addiction and Mental Health (2006) recognizes that Black Americans are typically underrepresented in voluntary mental health care. What remains unclear is *why* racial/ethnic disparities in psychological service use exist in countries like the U.S. and Canada.

Some research has suggested that such disparity is due to logistic reasons, such as financial or socioeconomic difficulties (e.g., costs or insurance coverage associated with psychotherapy; Snowden, 2001; Thompson, Bazile, & Akbar, 2004; United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2001), whereas recent data suggest more complex reasons involving other psychological, cultural, and systemic factors (Cummings & Druss, 2011; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2015). One key factor that has emerged from research with Black Americans is the *intention* to seek help from mental health professionals, where findings indicate low intentionality within this population (Campbell & Long, 2014; Conner et al., 2010; Njiwaji, 2012;

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this review, the term "Black Americans" is used to refer to individuals living in Canada and the United States who self-identify as Black or as being a person of African descent.