

APA Official Actions

Position Statement on Suicide Among Black Youth in the United States

Approved by the Board of Trustees, December 2020

Approved by the Assembly, November 2020

“Policy documents are approved by the APA Assembly and Board of Trustees. . . These are . . . position statements that define APA official policy on specific subjects. . .” – *APA Operations Manual*

Issue:

Suicide is the second leading cause of death among all youth aged 12-18 in the United States [1]. Though rising suicide rates across racial groups represent a major public health concern, research suggests that Black American youth in particular, require urgent and immediate attention [2, 3]. Between 2001-2017, completed suicide among Black American adolescent boys and girls increased by 60% and 182% respectively [4]. Self-reported suicide attempts and suicidal injury rates rose faster for black adolescents as compared to adolescents of other ethnic backgrounds between 1991 and 2017. During that same study period, black boys showed an increased rate of self-injury requiring medical attention by a doctor or nurse following a suicide attempt, when compared with boys from other racial/ethnic groups and black girls, suggesting the use of more lethal means[5].

A recent task force led by the Congressional Black Caucus [6] identified research gaps, with a call for specific attention to protective factors and best treatment practices. Despite the growing rates of suicide, black youth continue to have low rates of mental health engagement [6]. These findings underscore the urgency of the mental health crisis in black youth.

APA Position:

The American Psychiatric Association supports further research on the specific risk factors associated with suicide in Black youth and the implementation of effective interventions to address this issue.

Additional steps must include:

- 1. Increased funding for health disparities research, with an emphasis on assessment, prevention, and intervention to develop best practices to address suicidal behavior in Black youth.**
- 2. Removing structural barriers faced by the Black community in accessing treatment.**
- 3. Exploring the role of social determinants, such as early adverse childhood experiences, inadequate educational preparation for sustained employment, exposure to community and police violence, living in neighborhoods with concentrated poverty, and discrimination, as potential factors in understanding the increasing rate of suicide and low rate of mental health engagement in Black youth.**

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Collaborators: Council on Minority Mental Health and Health Disparities

References:

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3. Shain, B.N., *Increases in Rates of Suicide and Suicide Attempts Among Black Adolescents*. Pediatrics, 2019. **144**(5).
4. Price, J.H. and J. Khubchandani, *The Changing Characteristics of African-American Adolescent Suicides, 2001-2017*. J Community Health, 2019. **44**(4): p. 756-763.
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