

Event Brief

Webinar: Intersectionality and Complexity – Anti-Black Racism, Mental Health and COVID-19

October 19, 2023

The webinar [recording](#) and [slide deck](#) are available

Purpose

Racism is a stressor that burdens the mental and overall wellbeing of Black, Indigenous, and racialized Canadians and impacts on multiple levels, including individual and structural. Led by Liben Gebremikael (CEO) and Solomon Lome (Project Coordinator) from the [TAIBU Community Health Centre](#) (TAIBU), this webinar explored the historical and present-day impacts and disparities of Anti-Black racism on mental health in Canada, punctuating the COVID-19 pandemic effects on the wellbeing of Black Canadians. This webinar also introduced the importance of Afrocentricity, especially as part of knowledge mobilization.

Participants

This open webinar was attended by 55 individuals. Attendees included members of project teams served by the KDE Hub (i.e., projects funded as part of the *Mental Health Promotion Innovation Fund, Supporting the Mental Health of Those Most Affected by COVID-19, and Mental Health in the Early Years*), members of the Public Health Agency of Canada, the Knowledge Development and Exchange (KDE) Hub, and others.

Meeting structure

- The webinar opened with Alice Schmidt Hanbidge (Scientific Co-Director, KDE Hub) making land and ancestral acknowledgements and introducing the presenters from TAIBU.
- Liben and Solomon gave a presentation that explored the roots and manifestations of anti-Black racism in Canada, including impact on wellbeing, as well as intersectional effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of Black Canadians. Participants were invited to reflect on their understanding of anti-Black racism and Afrocentrism throughout the webinar.
- Following their presentation, Liben and Solomon engaged in dialogue and answered questions from audience members.
- Colleen McMillan (Scientific Co-Director, KDE Hub) closed the webinar with brief announcements from the KDE Hub.

What did we learn?

- The overall health and wellbeing of Black Canadians is influenced by the complex, overlapping interplay between COVID-19 impacts, social determinants of health (SDOH), Black mental health, and Anti-Black racism.
- Being Black/Blackness in Canada is multidimensional and shaped by historical misrepresentations and the ongoing reinforcement of discriminatory assumptions.
- Anti-Black racism (“*beliefs, attitudes, prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination directed at people of African descent*”) is embedded in the policies and practices of Canadian institutions and has given rise to inadequate health services and disproportionate rates of mental health problems among Black communities.
- COVID-19 exacerbated existing disparities and ongoing negative impacts of anti-Black racism on the SDOH. For example, Black communities were less able to work from home, travelled more, and experienced more job loss/unemployment and much higher rates of COVID-19 mortality.
- TAIBU works to improve Black health outcomes through intersectional, equity-based and culturally affirming practices, using a model of Black wellbeing centred on **preventing** ill-health, **restoring** health and wellness, and **advancing** community care and wellbeing.
- One example of TAIBU’s work to address anti-Black racism at the systems level is the *Amandla Olwazi Project* - a national Afrocentric knowledge mobilization project to raise awareness of the impacts of anti-Black racism on the mental health of Black Canadians
- Afrocentricity is embedded into one’s culture and identity and is a uniting force that builds solidarity and connected action among diverse Black populations. Afrocentric ways and feelings are expressed through storytelling, art, a shared sense of knowledge/consciousness, inter-generational interactions, and community conversations.
- Addressing intersectional disparities requires moving beyond education to build capacity and empowerment, which leads to sustainability. Community participants given decision-making power gain the capacity to actively engage in and sustain community programs.
- Community organizations may face disconnect between the goals of funders vs. those of the community. TAIBU’s approach is to design programs based on the expressed needs of their community and then request funding to match. It’s important to speak up to voice community needs and negotiate with funders using a clear flow of information and flexibility.
- TAIBU has worked very hard to build trust and establish good relationships that allow open and genuine communication with the community. In the context of these trusted relationships, Black racialized communities can feel comfortable to ask questions and to receive services.

Want to learn more?

- Resources about Black mental health and wellness are currently under development by TAIBU. These will be hosted on the KDE Hub’s website once available.
- Stay tuned for information about an upcoming webinar (planned for winter 2024) that will dive deeper into Afrocentricity and Afrocentric ways of knowing and knowledge sharing.

