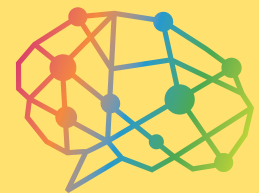




Your Mind Matters: An African Nova Scotian Youth Education Project

This study was conducted at the Nova Scotia Early Psychosis Program (NSEPP). NSEPP aims to reduce treatment delay for African Nova Scotian youth who develop psychosis throughout the province of Nova Scotia. To support this goal, they have expanded upon an existing community education initiative called *Because Your Mind Matters* (BYMM), which was launched in October 2013. While implementation of *Because Your Mind Matters* has been very successful, it is recognized that a gap exists within *Because Your Mind Matters* resources for culturally appropriate education materials on early phase psychosis to reach African Nova Scotia youth.

Study purpose: To create culturally appropriate community education resources to enable young African Nova Scotian youth to recognize early warning signs of psychosis, and to encourage them in looking after their own mental health and that of their peers.



SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:

- Perceptions and beliefs about mental illness among African Nova Scotian youth reflect the perceptions and beliefs in the broader African Nova Scotian community.
- The African Nova Scotian community tends to avoid the topic of mental illness or deny its prevalence in the community.
- There is a considerable lack of knowledge and understanding about mental illness.
- African Nova Scotians are brought up to be self-reliant and strong, which make it difficult for them to reach out for help.
- A fear of police involvement in their care contributes to a reluctance to seek help and a dismissal of the gravity of mental health concerns in the African Nova Scotian community.
- For many youth, self-medication in the form of drug and alcohol use is used to cope with mental health struggles.
- There is a long history in Black communities, including African Nova Scotian communities, of relying on church and religion to address emotional and mental health struggles.
- There is a general lack of trust in the health system, as well as a lack of comfort with health providers. This could be due to previous harm done to them or others they know in the community.
- The lack of cultural competency demonstrated by mental health professionals is a significant barrier to help-seeking among youth.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Creating a list of Black health and mental health professionals that can be provided to youth.
- Advocating for the hiring of an African Nova Scotian mental health advocate in the health care system.
- Offering training and education to church ministers and other spiritual leaders about ways to support people with mental illness.
- Partnering with community organizations to provide referrals to mental health services.
- Identifying key young Black leaders or initiatives that can help spread the word about the need to seek help for psychosis and other mental illnesses.
- Setting up a 311 African Nova Scotian help line.
- Developing partnerships with African Nova Scotian groups, churches, health programs at schools, universities, and other organizations in the community.
- Forming a youth advisory committee that can organize and hold educational sessions on psychosis for youth.
- Forming a group comprised of African Nova Scotian mental health professionals, youth workers, and individuals from Nova Scotia Health that can hold sessions on psychosis and mental health in African Nova Scotian communities.
- Providing opportunities for African Nova Scotian youth to design their own mental health campaigns.
- Developing creative tools to share information about psychosis, such as an app, videos, plays, art, music, and television ads/educational commercials and, finally,
- Sharing information about psychosis and other mental illnesses in the African Nova Scotian community through *Bell Let's Talk* and other media campaigns.

Though these are meant for African Nova Scotian youth, many of these recommendations can be adapted to meet the needs of Black youth on campuses in Ontario.

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