

Disparities in educational experiences of black youth

September 21 2017, by Neil Schoenherr

A more comprehensive picture of mental health that includes subjective well-being and other positive mental health characteristics could lead to more successful educational experiences among black youth, finds a recent study from the Brown School at Washington University in St. Louis.

"We demonstrated the need to use a dual-factor model of [mental health](#) among adolescents generally, and black adolescents specifically," said Sean Joe, the Benjamin E. Youngdahl Professor of Social Development and co-author of the study, "Mental Health and Educational Experiences Among Black Youth: A Latent Class Analysis," published in the *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*.

The study was lead by his long-term collaborator and former doctoral student, Theda Rose, assistant professor at the University Maryland, an expert in adolescent mental health promotion and measurements.

"The dual-factor model is particularly important as there has been a prevailing emphasis on the absence of dysfunction as a way to conceptualize mental health," Joe and colleagues wrote in the paper. "Our finding suggests that this narrower conceptualization does not lend itself to a full inclusion of the positive psychosocial changes adolescents may experience."

Joe is a nationally recognized leader on black adolescent mental health and family-based interventions.

The key finding from the study suggests that higher bonding to school is strongly associated with having better mental health, and that those with poor mental health experience other problematic school issues such as grade retention and school suspensions. Though there has been much study on school bonding, its association to positive mental [health](#) among [black youth](#) is important, as school bonding is a malleable factor and can be a target of intervention.

"Ongoing efforts are needed to address disparities in the educational experiences of black youth," Joe and colleagues wrote. "The results of this study, along with existing developmental literature, support the continued exploration of culturally relevant [school](#) and community-based interventions that address subjective well-being, [mental health problems](#), as well as improved educational experiences among black youth.

"As adolescence is a critical period for intervention, these strategies are an essential part of an agenda to promote positive development among black [youth](#)."

More information: Theda Rose et al. Mental Health and Educational Experiences Among Black Youth: A Latent Class Analysis, *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* (2017). [DOI: 10.1007/s10964-017-0723-3](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-017-0723-3)

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