

Multiracial Black adults more likely to need mental health services than monoracial Blacks, study finds

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California adults who identify as Black and at least one other race are more likely to need mental health services than those who identify only

as Black, according to a study published today by the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research.

In five years of surveys, approximately 18% to 21% of multiracial Black adults reported having experienced serious psychological distress over the previous 12 months—nearly double the 11% for monoracial Black adults, researchers found.

The study also found that among all California Black adults—both multiracial and monoracial—those who were born in the United States were twice as likely to have experienced serious psychological distress (14%) as those born elsewhere (7%). Those born outside the U.S., however, were more likely to have mental health needs that were unmet, the researchers said.

The study, which used data from the 2017 to 2021 California Health Interview Surveys, is the center's first to assess the mental health needs and unmet need for mental health services among Black adult groups in California, broken down by racial identity and place of birth. California's Black adult population numbers roughly 2 million overall, of whom 76% are monoracial and 24% are multiracial.

"Analyzing the Black adult population as a single group simply does not reflect the nuances of different structural or social determinants that may lead to poor mental health or create barriers in accessing timely and appropriate care," said the study's lead author, Imelda Padilla-Frausto, a research scientist at the center.

"Disaggregating the data makes it possible to see differences in the needs or unmet needs for mental health services among different groups, and this information, in turn, can be used to help inform tailored programs and services for prevention and intervention."

The authors looked at adults experiencing both serious psychological distress, which can interfere with a person's daily life and requires intensive [mental health services](#), and moderate psychological distress, which, if untreated, could become severe and disabling. Individuals with unmet mental health needs were defined as those who need mental health care but were not receiving it.

Among the findings:

- Among all Black adults with serious or moderate psychological distress, 43% had unmet needs.
- Among adults with serious or moderate psychological distress, the percentage who had unmet mental health needs ranged from a low of nearly 31% for those identifying as Black and another race to a high of 49% for those identifying as both Black and Latino.
- A total of 41% of U.S.-born Black adults had unmet mental health needs, compared with 59% of those who were not born in the U.S.

Along with disaggregating data to advance mental health equity, the study's authors suggest changes to state policies, such as requiring anti-racism training by state and local governments, increasing [multiracial](#) and foreign-born diversity among mental health providers, and partnering with community and faith-based organizations and others who can reach specific subpopulations of Black adults.

Padilla-Frausto noted, "As the Black population continues to grow in this country, so does the need to understand the diverse experiences impacting mental well-being and access to care among these various groups."

More information: D. Imelda Padilla-Frausto et al, [Variation in](#)

[Mental Health Care Needs and in Unmet Need for Care Among Groups of Black Adults in California \(2023\)](#)

Provided by University of California, Los Angeles

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