

Study highlights role of mindfulness in mental health for young Black adults

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Over the past decade, suicide rates have increased by 30% for Black Americans. By contrast, in a similar time frame, epidemiological data reveals a decrease in suicide trends for white Americans. A new study,

led by University of Houston psychology doctoral student Jasmin Brooks and directed by professor of psychology Rheeda Walker, examines the role of mindfulness, a robust coping mechanism, on the association between impulsivity and suicidal risk within a sample of Black emerging adults.

The study is published in the journal *Mindfulness*.

Mindfulness, or living in the present, means directing your attention to fully experience the current moment, free from judgments based on the past or anxiety about the future. It involves training your brain to concentrate on your senses and physical actions as you encounter them. In psychological terms, [impulsivity](#) is a predisposition toward rapid, unplanned reactions to internal or [external stimuli](#) without regard to the negative consequences of these reactions.

Walker directs the "Culture, Risk, and Resilience Lab" at the university. She indicated that her research over the last two decades consistently reveals that important psychological buffers can diffuse potential vulnerability to mental health crisis.

"Our current findings support the clinical utility of mindfulness as a potential buffer to the negative consequences of impulsivity for Black Americans," the researchers report. "Suicide among Black Americans is a complex phenomenon that may be best understood via an analysis of risk factors in tandem with protective factors."

While impulsivity is a factor often associated with suicidal risk, few studies have examined the association between impulsivity and suicidal risk, or clinically relevant protective factors, for Black Americans. Similarly, few studies have examined the role of mindfulness in the context of impulsivity and suicidal risk for Black Americans.

For this research, the first of its kind, the UH team examined data from 332 Black emerging adults with an average age of 22 years. Participants completed an online questionnaire battery that included measures of impulsivity, mindfulness, suicide ideation and elevated suicide risk.

"Mediation analyses revealed that impulsivity was directly and indirectly associated with [suicide ideation](#) and elevated suicide risk via lower levels of mindfulness," said Brooks.

Among Black Americans, [mindfulness](#) is also associated with a host of favorable health outcomes, including decreased [suicidal ideation](#) and depressive symptomatology, lower levels of substance use, lower levels of psychological distress, increased psychological well-being, and adaptive coping strategy selection.

"Ideally, we would live in a society that doesn't create unnecessary stress or incite mistreatment," said Walker. "Until that is a reality, a mindful disposition is an important source of resilience."

More information: Jasmin R. Brooks Stephens et al, Living in the Present Moment: The Role of Mindfulness in the Association Between Impulsivity and Suicidality Among Black Emerging Adults, *Mindfulness* (2023). [DOI: 10.1007/s12671-023-02180-x](https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-023-02180-x)

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