

Study: Black mental health professionals more susceptible to burnout, race-based traumatic stress

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During the peak of COVID-19, the Black community experienced more deaths than the white community, 441.9 out of 100,000 Black persons

compared to 268.5 out of 100,000 white persons in the U.S. The deleterious effects of COVID-19 then were compounded for many Black people by the highly publicized killings by police of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and George Floyd that went viral on social media during the pandemic.

Both the American Psychological Association and the American Counseling Association reported that the pandemic, [economic crisis](#) and greater visibility of racial injustice resulted in a significant increase in [mental health concerns](#) for millions of people in the U.S.

In a new study, researchers at Boston University Chobanian & Avedisian School of Medicine have found that Black mental health professionals (BMHPs) had significantly high rates of [burnout](#) and racial [trauma](#) across a range of 15 helping professions ([social workers](#), doctors, nurses) and ethnicities.

The study is [published](#) in the journal *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*.

"Distress and mistrust of white mental health professionals within the Black community have resulted in many Black therapists experiencing increased demands for counseling. Black counselors and psychologists are increasingly finding themselves needing to process not only the racial traumatic stress of their clients, but also their own emotional reactions to personal racialized experiences as well as the recent killings of Black persons and loss of Black lives during the COVID pandemic," explained corresponding author Eric Brown, Ph.D., assistant professor of psychiatry at the school.

The researchers surveyed 182 Black psychologists and counselors to assess their rates of racial trauma, burnout and levels of social support. They were also asked if they had mentors, how often they met with

them, and the degree to which they felt a sense of calling to work with people within the Black community.

The researchers found that higher levels of social support and an understanding that things outside of one's control greatly impact one's life predicted lower levels of burnout and racial trauma among BMHPs. Additionally, higher levels of resilient coping were significant predictors of lower levels of burnout. Lastly, more frequent meetings with a mentor significantly predicted lower levels of racial trauma in this group.

According to the researchers, Black mental health clinicians are playing a key role in community healing even as attending to the mental health of Black patients may leave them more vulnerable to racial trauma and burnout.

"One way to advocate for racial equity in [mental health care](#), and to build trust within the Black community is to recruit and support more Black persons into the mental health professions. High levels of social support may serve to ameliorate some of the negative impacts of burnout and racial trauma."

More information: Eric M. Brown et al, Burnout, racial trauma, and protective experiences of Black psychologists and counselors., *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy* (2024). [DOI: 10.1037/tra0001726](https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0001726)

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