



Black Men & Boys

“Strengthening Community for Black Men and Boys Project”

A Comprehensive Assessment of Needs

Los Angeles County



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Mindful Training Solutions, LLC completed this report through the funding and support of California's Mental Health Services Act, the County of Los Angeles, the County of Los Angeles' Department of Mental Health (DMH), and the LA County Department of Mental Health's Underserved Cultural Committee for Black & African Heritage (LACDMH BAH UsCC).



WELLNESS • RECOVERY • RESILIENCE



LOS ANGELES COUNTY
**DEPARTMENT OF
MENTAL HEALTH**
hope. recovery. wellbeing.



About This Project

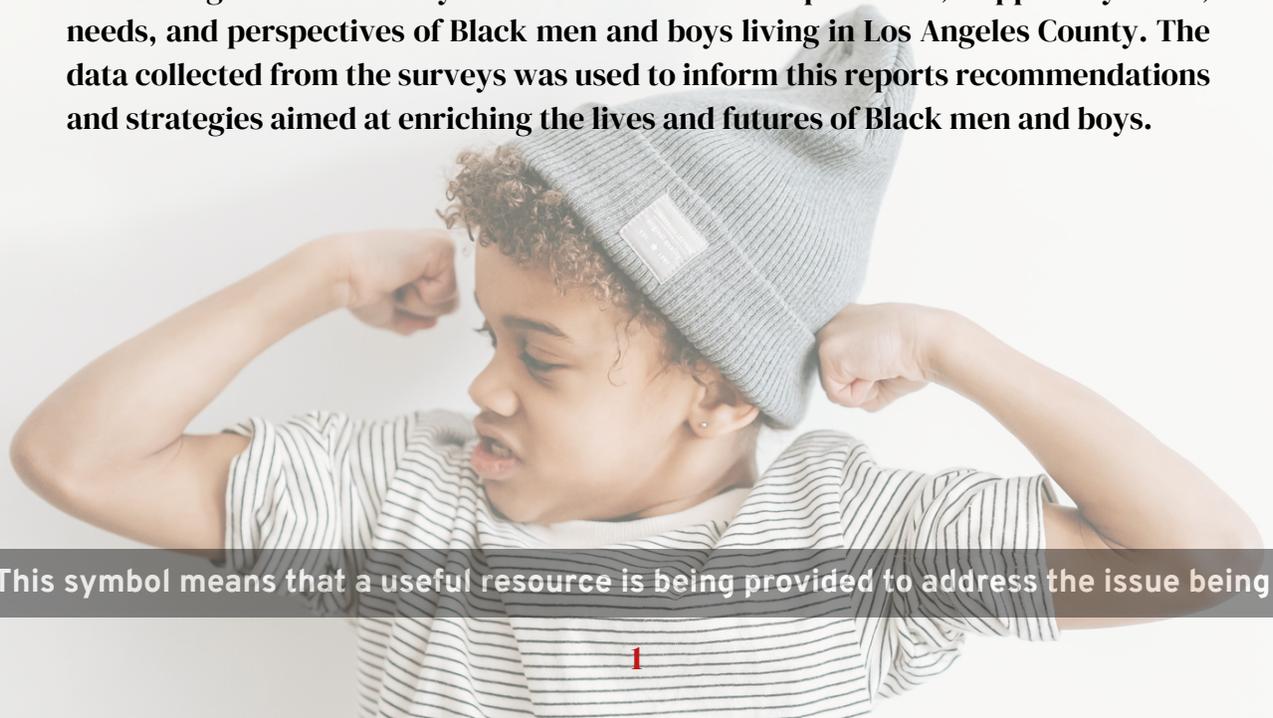
The objective of the Strengthening Community Connections Project (SCCP) for Black Men & Boys is to craft a comprehensive framework of support for Black men and boys across the county of Los Angeles. In building the foundation of this work, we took time to listen to the needs and experiences of Black men and boys. These spaces were enriched through the creation of a proactive and nurturing collaboration where their voices were validated and experiences appreciated:

Facilitated Workshop Series & Interviews

Workshops focused on early intervention and advocacy to explore issues such as anxiety, trauma, and adverse health outcomes. Participants received mentorship, training, resources, wellness tools, and advocacy, coupled with psychoeducation, to enhance their daily experiences and shed light on the effects of intergenerational trauma. Each participant was tasked to share their learnings with family and community members.

County Mental Wellness Climate Survey

Our strength-based survey tool focused on the experiences, support systems, needs, and perspectives of Black men and boys living in Los Angeles County. The data collected from the surveys was used to inform this reports recommendations and strategies aimed at enriching the lives and futures of Black men and boys.



This symbol means that a useful resource is being provided to address the issue being discussed.



Workshop participants at California State University Dominguez Hills

261

Surveys Complete

48

Workshop Participants

96

Individual Interviewees

72+

LA County Communities
Represented

Artesia, Burbank, Carson, Cerritos, Compton, Culver City, Gardena, Hawthorne, Inglewood, Los Angeles, Manhattan Beach, Mar Vista, North Hollywood, Norwalk, Pasadena, Pomona, Santa Clarita, Torrance, View Park, West Hollywood, Wilmington, and more.

Survey responses excluded: Victorville, Sacramento, and Riverside

93%

Encountered Racism across three+
domains as children and adults.

School, Work, Shopping A (groceries & clothes), Shopping B (cars & homes), Recreation (parks & beaches), Neighborhood, Justice System (family & criminal), Financial Services (banks & mortgages), Medical Services (doctors visits & children's birth), Vacation/Travel.

“Black men are misjudged because of a market that promotes and reinforces the stereotypical Black man as a juggernaut and the everyday Black man often gets overshadowed.”

-Survey Respondent age 46-55 from West Athens (90047)



The participants in our survey, focus groups, interviews, and workshops represent the diversity of Black men across the American diaspora. Participants identified as African American, African, Afro-Latino, and Caribbean. In addition to the cultural diversity amongst our participants, their lived experiences included different abilities, levels of educational attainment, sexual orientations, and socioeconomic statuses.

WHAT BEST DESCRIBES YOUR ACADEMIC JOURNEY?

19.4% High School/GED **16.1%** Completed Bachelors Degree
17.6% Some College **7.4%** Some Graduate School
11.8% Associates Degree **19.1%** Completed Masters Degree
7.4% Doctoral Degree (PsyD, EdD,JD, PhD)

HOW OLD ARE YOU?

13.2% 16-20 years old **16.2%** 36-45 years old
10.3% 21-25 years old **35.7%** 46-55 years old
9.7% 26-35 years old **5.8%** 56-65 years old
8.8% Over 65 years old

I AM ABLE TO RECOGNIZE MY OWN STRENGTHS

54.5% Consistently **26.4%** Sometimes **19.1%** Rarely
Men Under 45 (29.4%) were less than half as likely to consistently recognize their own strengths when compared to **Men Over 45** (71.8%).

I HAVE A STRONG SUPPORT SYSTEM THAT I CAN RELY UPON.

41.7% Always **41.2%** Sometimes **16.2%** Never
Compton, Gardena, Vermont Corridor, Pasadena, Rancho Park, Windsor Hills and Pomona. Long Beach, Crenshaw District, Inglewood, Norwalk, Carson and Van Nuys.
46% of men who report ALWAYS having a support system they can rely upon have a *Masters Degree*.
50% of men who report NEVER having a support system they can rely upon are *between the ages of 26 and 35*.

I AM HAPPY WITH MY LIFE

55.8% Normally **34.5%** Sometimes **13.2%** Rarely
44.4% of men who are RARELY happy with their lives are *under 21 years old*.
65.6% of men who are NORMALLY happy with their lives are *over 45 years old*.

Listening to Black Teen Boys

We worked with Black boys ages 13-15 in a set of specially curated workshops and focus groups. They were engaged in discussions about mental wellness, racism and stress, trauma, resilience, learning differences, and suicide. These young men were engaged throughout the entire five-week process. They were supported by their parents and coaches who also attended the sessions. Here are some responses to our prompts.

What learning was most helpful?

“People die from suicide when people make fun of them.”

“Knowing where I came from.”

“Learning how to get rid of the stress off my shoulders.”

“Learning about Black kings and slaves.”

“I didn’t know people learned differently than me.”

What will you do differently as a result of your learning ?

“Put mental health first.”

“Be me and not change for no one.”

“I want to be more confident.”

What do you want to learn more about?

“More about Black kings and how did people get their rights.”

“I want to learn why slavery happened. “

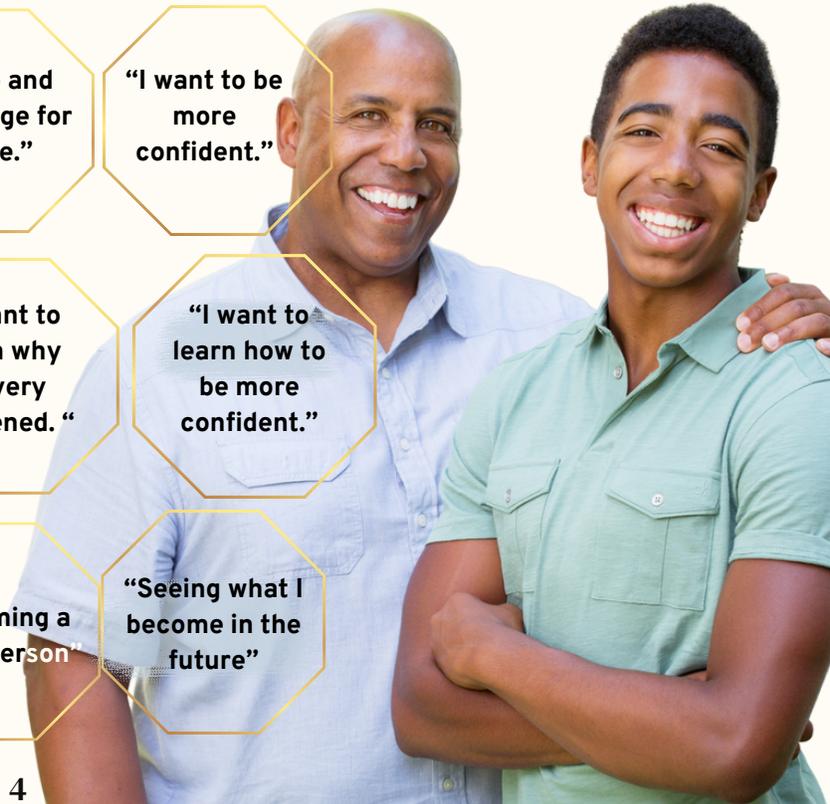
“I want to learn how to be more confident.”

What are you looking forward to?

“Making sure that Black people have all of their rights”

“Becoming a better person”

“Seeing what I become in the future”



DANGEROUS SYNERGY

RACISM & STRESS



Survey results show that the highest risks to Black men and boys in LA County exists where **Stress** and **Racism** intersect. *More than 2 in 3 (68.7%)* men surveyed confirm that their stress levels are directly impacted by their experiences with racism.

“Which describes your stress level?”

No Stress Same as Everyone I know Higher Stress

61.8% of Black men surveyed report higher stress levels than most people they know.

“I experience racism”

Rarely Sometimes Regularly

72.1% of Black men surveyed report experiencing racism more than just “sometimes”.

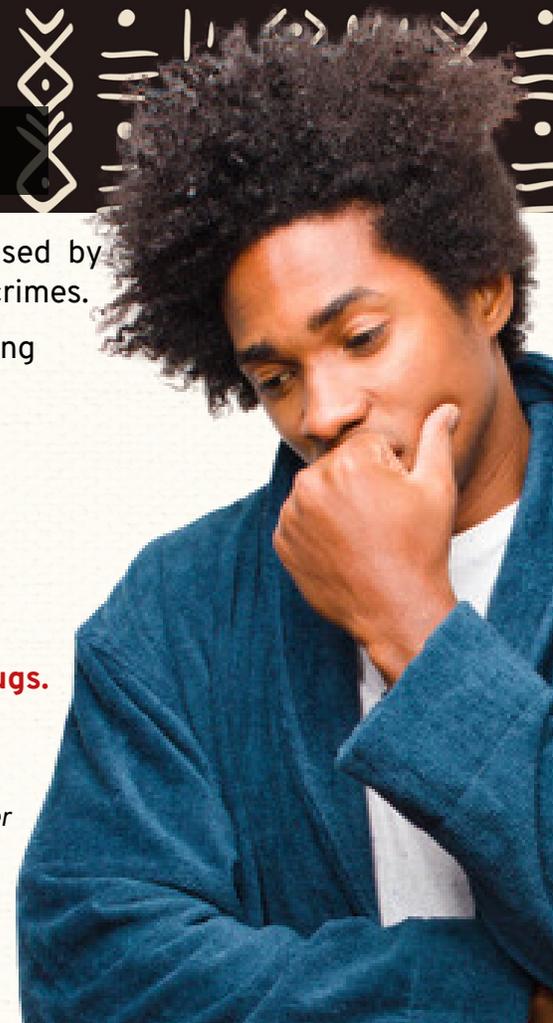
Findings show that Black men in LA County experience elevated levels of complex stress due to:

- the *pervasiveness of racism* across the lifespan. (Scope)
- the frequency with which discrimination -policies, practices, and behaviors- is experienced. (Scale)

Percent of Los Angeles County Black Men Who Report Racism and Discrimination (by space & time)

| Where | School | Community | Work | Medical Service | Justice System | Finance | Shopping | Recreation | Vacation |
|-----------|------------|-------------|-------------|-----------------|----------------|-------------|-------------|------------|-------------|
| When | | | | | | | | | |
| Childhood | 94.3 ⚠️ | 75% ⚠️ | 56.2% | 52.9% | 50% | 38.5% | 56.9% | 76% ⚠️ | 56.5% |
| Adulthood | 50.9% | 77.8% ⚠️ | 81.2% ⚠️ | 94.1% ⚠️ | 85% ⚠️ | 96.2% ⚠️ | 83.9% ⚠️ | 84% ⚠️ | 82.6% ⚠️ |

ANXIETY & DISTRESS



Race-Based Stress(*Noun*): the mental and emotional injury caused by encounters with racial bias, ethnic discrimination, racism, and hate crimes.

This complex stress can impact daily activities like eating and sleeping while creating increased worry and frustration. *Of the men surveyed:*



75% report experiencing anxiety and feeling overwhelmed



71% report rarely (3 nights per week) sleeping 6 or more hours per night.



60% report “worrying a lot”.

64.7% of respondents report losing a loved one to violence or drugs.

Black Americans made up 13.6% of the US population in 2022 and **54.1% of murder and homicide victims.**



Overdose death rates for Black men rose by 245% from 2015-2020, nearly tripling from *17.3 deaths per 100K to 59.6.*

American Journal of Preventative Medicine (AJPM) 2022

Bloomberg Report 2023 & CDC

Black men ages 18-25 die from gun homicides at a rate nearly 19 times that of White residents in America’s largest counties; 77% of all LA County’s 2022 homicides involved firearms. CDC Epidemiological Research and LA City/LAPD Open Crime Data (2022)

Quotes from Survey Respondents & Workshop Participants

Racism is as American as, “apple pie”. We experienced it in Ways that our parents didn’t , and our children and grandchildren will have their own unique experience with it...“It is what it is”, but I refuse to *allow anger, stress, poor health and all the other maladies associated with our experience in this country* get in the way of me enjoying my life to the fullest. We are really not here that long.

-Age 65+ | Doctoral Degree Degree | View Park

I need other peoples help to change.

-Age 14 | High School | Norwalk

Listen to our stories and hear our cries for better health.

-Age 21-25 | Some College | Gardena

The constant negative and fearful stigma attached to ALL black men is exhausting.

-Age 56-65 | Some Grad School | Torrance

Most non-Blacks and Blacks are scared of Black men due to stereotyping globally.

-Age 46-55 | Masters Degree | LA 90016

Black men mental should be taken more into consideration as we all go through different things in our lives.

- Age 16-21 | Some College | Pomona

The subconscious burdens that are placed on black men not to be looked at as predatory. The way we dress, present ourselves or normal things we choose to be involved in. There is a mental burden that exists that we consistently carry that is unique unto us.

-Age 36-45 | Doctoral Degree Degree | *Rancho Cucamonga

Not enough emotions and love given to men in LA.

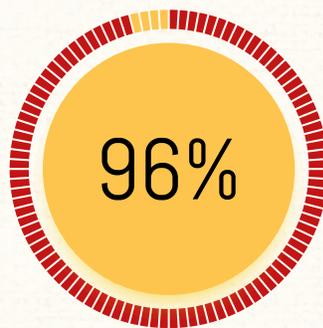
-Age 16-21 | Some College | Inglewood

HOPEFUL ENERGY

RESILIENCE & JOY

The picture for Black men and boys in LA County remains hopeful. In spite of the complex experiences faced across the lifespan, Black men have been able to show levels of adaptability and flexibility often uncommon in other communities.

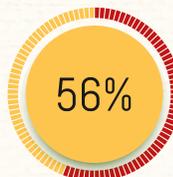
Survey respondents report the following:



“I am Resilient”



I am *consistently* able to recognize my own strengths.



I am *normally* happy with my life.

To foster resilience, identify strengths, and increase happiness:



Exercise strengthens our physical and mental resilience while reducing cortisol, the hormone that creates the experience of stress in our bodies.



Yoga creates mental clarity and calmness, increases body awareness, relieves chronic stress patterns, relaxes the mind, centers attention, and sharpens concentration.



Meditation reduces stress, controls anxiety, promotes well-being, enhances self-awareness, boosts cognitive skills, and improves sleep. Some studies say that it can also help control pain and fight addiction.



Journaling helps make sense of how we feel about a person or situation that is troubling or inspiring us. It can build confidence by helping you track progress and goals while honoring your experiences without judging them.

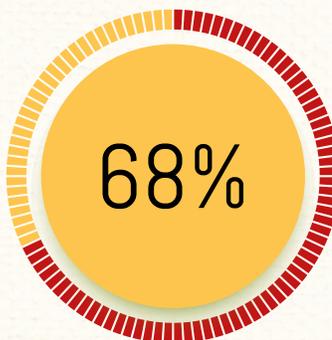
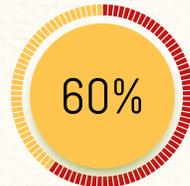
SUPPORT & CARE

Research shows that environments where people feel supported and have someone they trust to talk to about serious issues makes a significant difference in life satisfaction. These factors reduce feelings of isolation and support overall wellness. Survey respondents report the following:

I can talk openly about mental health to my family *sometimes*.



I *always* have someone I trust that I can talk to about most things.



I consistently have a strong support system I can rely on

To create and sustain supportive environments:



Discuss Mental Health openly. If you're not sure how to start the conversation or what to say, the best thing you can do is be honest and ask if they're okay.



Show care and concern by letting loved ones know that you care about them, their safety, and their well-being. *Learn how with NAMI's "Reaching In" (NAMI.org)* 



Get trained in Mental Health First Aid to help break the stigma surrounding mental health by learning how to normalize these discussions (*MentalHealthFirstAid.org*) 



Assist loved ones in finding the help they need. This might be a therapist, a processing group, a life coach, a mentor, or a peer support person. Find professional help at [PsychologyToday.com](https://www.psychologytoday.com), [GoodTherapy.org](https://www.goodtherapy.org), or [HelloAlma.com](https://www.helloalma.com). 





Special Considerations

“Everyday is a battle. Racism is systematic and affects everything from noise, streets, finances, wealth, air quality and more. We must work extra hard and bond together. I’m proud to be a black male contributing to society.”

-Age 26-35 | Masters Degree | West Athens”

As Black men and boys navigate a distinctive journey through life, it becomes crucial to delve into the intersections of issues and identity. This section will specifically address various conditions, scenarios, and experiences that uniquely affect Black men and boys. These factors interact synergistically with environmental risks, creating challenges not encountered by other demographic groups.

It is not possible to explore all the spaces where Black men and boys experience disproportionate pain and disparate outcomes. We however find it critical that programs, schools, and institutions serving Black men understand these outcomes to develop tailored services that see the needs of Black men and boys more holistically. The following are explored further to inform programming and service delivery.

- The causal and correlational relationship between Black male Physical Wellness and Mental Health
- The etiologies and ramifications of the Black Male Premature Death Toll.
- The growing epidemic of Black Male Suicide (boys and men).
- The impact of the Black Maternal Mortality crisis on Black men and boys.



Physical Wellness for Black Men & Boys

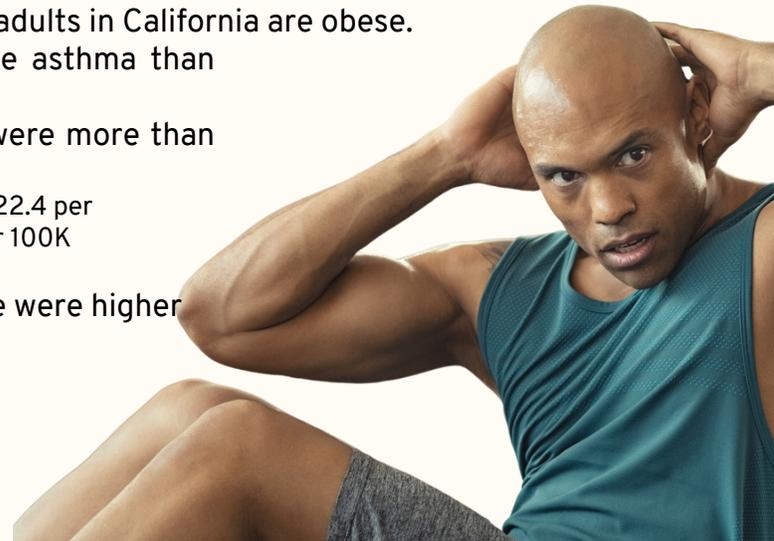
Our mental wellness is directly connected to our physical wellness in many ways. Some of these connections are complex and some are very straight forward. Many people experience stress and anxiety when they are not well or in pain, while some conditions and diseases actually harm our brains and nervous systems directly.

Black men in California are disproportionately represented in preventable hospitalizations due to *congestive heart failure, diabetes, asthma, substance use, liver disease, and fire arms*. Research shows that exercise and meditation reduce health concerns that often lead to dysfunction, disability, and pre-mature death. Health forward behaviors can address some of these disparities.

Black people experience health disparities that impact almost every domain of life.

{Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) & Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF)}

- \$238 Billion- 2018 Economic Burden of Black Health Inequities
 - The sum of excess medical care expenditures, lost labor market productivity, and the value of excess premature death.
- HIV/AIDS diagnoses for Black Americans was roughly 7 times higher than White Americans in 2020.
 - Black Americans have the lowest 'viral suppression rate' of all races (White Americans 71%).
 - Viral Suppression is critical to eliminate HIV by optimizing health outcomes and minimizing HIV transmission.
- 28% of Black children and 36.1% of Black adults in California are obese.
- Black children are twice as likely to have asthma than White children (17% vs 9%).
- Diabetic deaths for Black people (2021) were more than twice the rate of White or Asian people
 - 46.3 per 100K (Black) | 18.1 per 100K (Asian) | 22.4 per 100K(White) | 29.4 per 100K (Latinx) | 54.4 per 100K (Indigenous)
- Heart Disease death rates for Black people were higher than any other American group in 2021.

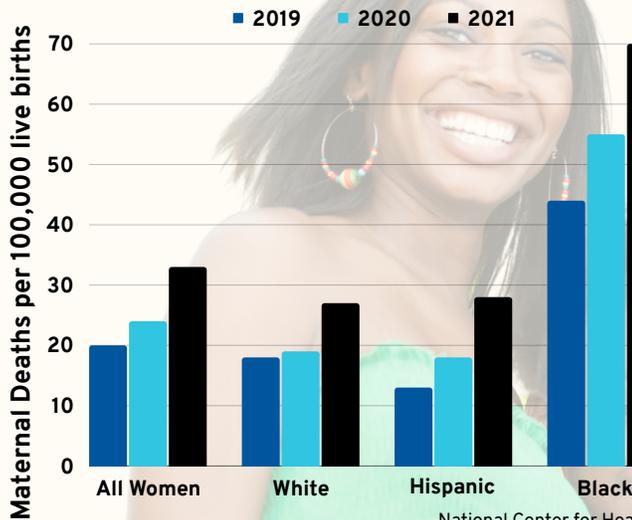


Black Maternal Mortality & Black Men

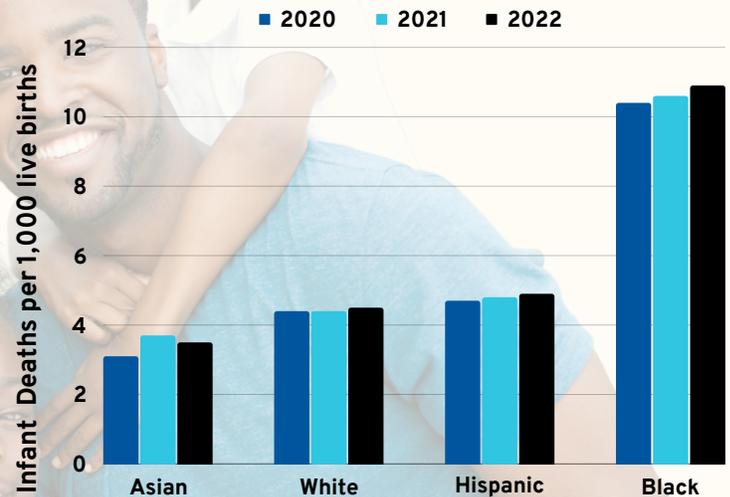
Due to the epidemic deaths of Black women and Black babies on the birthing tables across America, Black men are suffering from complex traumas that other men don't have to manage. Black fathers mourn the deaths of their wives, partners, daughters, infants, and grand children at more than twice the rate of any other American man.

- Black women die at twice the rate of White women, and three times the rate of Hispanic/Latinx women during and after childbirth (42 days postpartum).
- Black infants are **3.8 times** as likely to die from complications related to low birthweight as compared to non-Hispanic White infants.
- Black babies are more likely to survive if cared for by a Black physician

US Maternal Mortality Rates 2019-2021



US Infant Mortality Rates 2020-2022



National Center for Health Statistics, National Vital Statistics System: Mortality



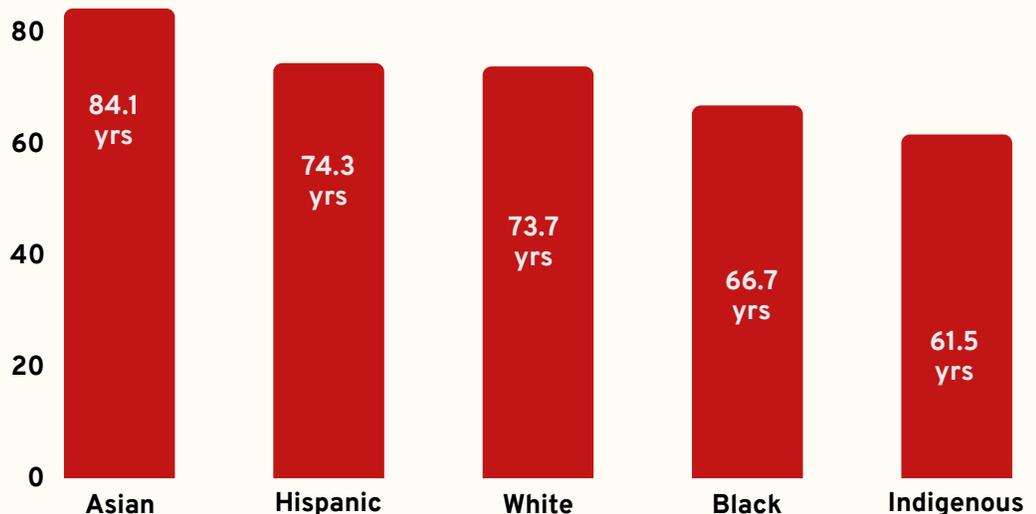
Contact ***Black Infants & Families Los Angeles*** where their **African American Infant and Maternal Mortality Community Action Team** provides resources and supports. www.BlackInfantsAndFamilies.org

Premature Deaths of Black Men & Boys

The trauma stemming from Black males' premature deaths represents a public health crisis in America. At **67 years, 8 months, and 2-weeks**, the life expectancy of Black men is the lowest of all Americans besides Indigenous men (61 years and 6 months).

- Black people experienced the largest decline (-4yrs) in life expectancy.
- 1.63 Million Excess Black Deaths from 1999-2020.
 - 997,623 Black men died prematurely
 - 628,464 Black women died prematurely
- 80 Million Years of Black Life Loss from 1999-2020 due to premature death.
 - Heart disease was the highest contributor to years lost by early death.
 - Infant mortality was the highest contributor to years of 'potential life lost'.

Average Life Expectancy of US Men



Black Men & Boys: Depression & Suicide

Research shows that Black men in America report higher degrees of serious psychological distress than most other groups. Experience with racism, discrimination, poverty, incarceration, medical illness, and family loss exacerbates the distress severely. Black Americans over 18 endorse feeling sad, helpless, and worthless (all or most of the time) far more than other cultural groups. (CDC 2022)

- In 2020, suicide was the **third leading cause of death** for Black Americans ages 15-24.
- Black boys (ages 5-12) are **twice as likely to die from suicide** than White youth.
- Studies revealed that Black men had a **larger increase in suicide attempts than any other racial group** from 2020-2021.
- In 2015, for the 1st time, researchers identified that **Black kids (ages 5-11) were dying by suicide at rates higher** than their White counterparts.
- The death rate from suicide for Black men was **four times greater** than for African American women (2018).
- Research shows that **Caribbean men have the highest attempt rate** of all US Black men.
- 10.7% of Black male students (grades 9-12) **seriously considered suicide** in 2019.
- From 1980 - 1995, the suicide rate among Black kids ages 10 to 14 **increased 233%**.

Journal of the American Medical Association 2023, American Association of Suicidology, US Department of Health and Human Services: Office of Minority Health, American Association of Medical Colleges

Use these resources

- Read: *Still Ringing the Alarm: An enduring call to action for Black youth suicide prevention*. Johns Hopkins University August 23, 2023.
- Create a Safety Plan to guide you through a crisis.
- Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: Text, Chat, or Call 988
- Crisis Text Line: Text "HOME" to 741741
- LACDMH Helpline: Call 800.854.7771



"There's this narrative that suicide is a white thing and that's not true. There's also this history that is associated with slavery, Suicide was very much a part of chattel slavery. Some of the very first suicide prevention technologies were developed on slave ships."

-Dr. Janel Cubbage (suicidologist)

INSIGHTS & RECOMMENDATIONS

BLACK BOYS ARE IN CRISIS AND VIGILANCE IS REQUIRED



- Parents, caregivers, guardians, teachers, coaches, mentors, and religious leaders must learn to talk to Black boys about emotional wellness given the suicide data and workshop responses.
- Parents must provide psychological incentives for Black boys to discuss emotions and address mental wellness. Stigma makes it antithetical to their identity.
- Mental Health First Aid training must be made mandatory for all little league sports team coaches. (Often a boys most trusted non-family member)
- Families must eliminate youth access to firearms. Guns remain the primary means of suicide for Black boys.

RACISM IS A SIGNIFICANT RISK FACTOR FOR BLACK EMOTIONAL DISTRESS



- All therapists, counselors, and mental health professionals must be trained on the impact Anti-Black Racism has on Black Americans capacity to mediate their wellness. This should a pre-licensure requirement with mandated continuing education requirements.
- Black people (teens and adults) must learn about race-based stress to contextualize their experiences with race-based traumas. They may feel inadequate and blame themselves for the weight of the unexplained.
- School systems must be held accountable for the disparate outcomes experienced by Black boys across LA County.

STIGMA STOPS EMOTIONAL ENGAGEMENT FOR BLACK MEN AND BOYS



- Black men must be coached to not feel like ‘a burden’ when in emotional distress. This reportedly halts help-seeking behaviors.
- Systems must dedicate increased resources to evidence based practices that reduce mental health stigma in Black communities.
- Programs to assist Black families in building models to discuss mental health, family histories/secrets, trauma, mental illness, and learning differences.

INSIGHTS & RECOMMENDATIONS CONTINUED



STRENGTHS MUST BE DELIBERATELY FOSTERED IN BLACK MEN & BOYS

- Given the unique risk factors that Black men and boys face, everyone should engage in a strength's exploration exercise. (IE Clifton's StrengthFinders)
- All services aimed at supporting Black men and boys should be delivered through a Strength Based lens. Black men are consistently exposed to and reminded of their deficits due to environmental risk factors (IE stereotypes, discrimination, over-incarceration, over-surveillance). This can be mediated through consistent and robust strength based engagements.
- Black men and boys must experience corrective emotional experiences to combat the experiences that render them feeling inadequate, isolated, uncared for, ignored, and discriminated against.

BLACK MALE INTERSECTIONAL IDENTITIES MUST BE CONSISTENTLY CONSIDERED. SYSTEMS MUST PAY SPECIAL ATTENTION TO OUTCOMES FOR THESE GROUPS DUE TO RISK FACTOR AGGREGATION.



ACQUIRED IDENTITY

- Unhoused Black boys and men
- Black Veterans
- Black men who can't read or write.
- Black boys in foster care
- Justice Involved Black men and boys
- Black men in recovery

INHERENT IDENTITY

- Black infant mental health
- Black aging men
- LGBTQ Black males and men who have sex with men.
- Black men and boys with learning differences and ASD
- Black men and boys with physical disabilities.

Black Joy Reminder

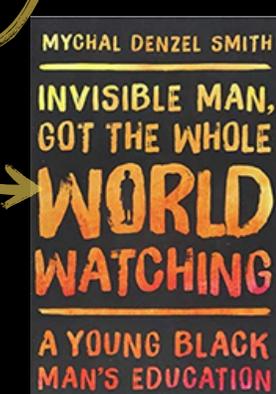
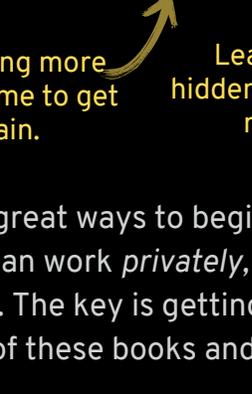
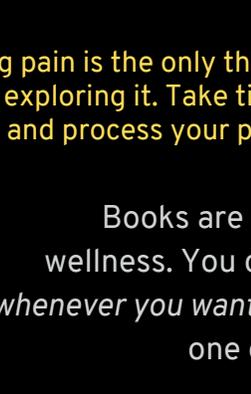
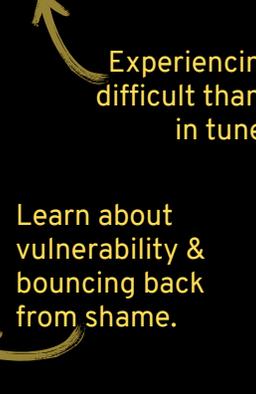
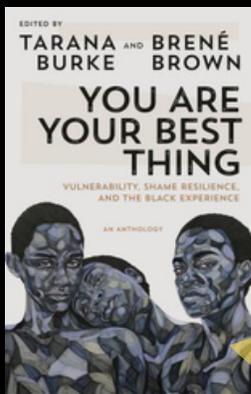
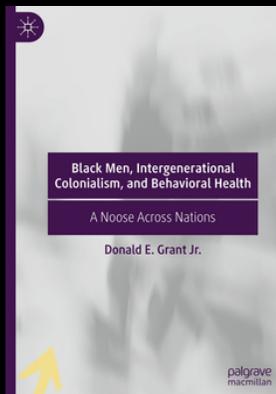
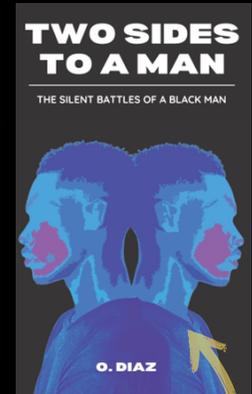
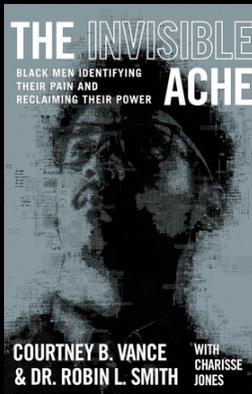
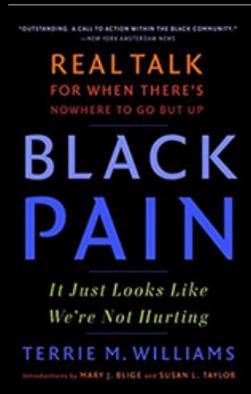
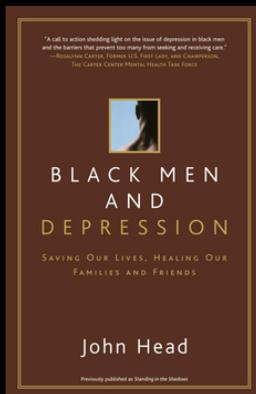
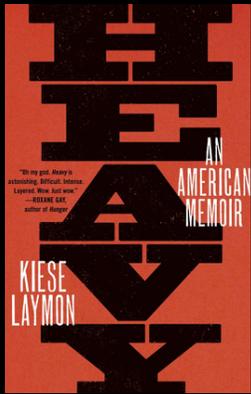
Black Joy is Revolutionary

because it was - in recent history - legislated against, criminalized, and justified as a reason for the murder and dismemberment of Black bodies.

Lets ensure Black men and boys get to experience Black Joy in all its forms at all times.



Helpful Books for Black Men



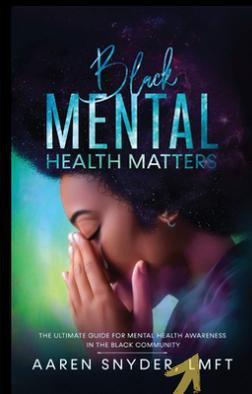
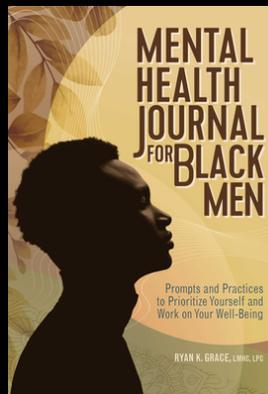
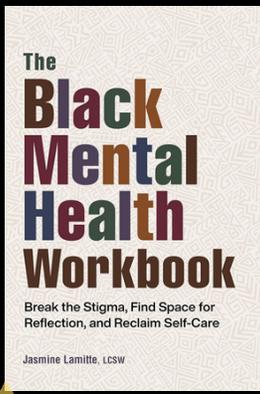
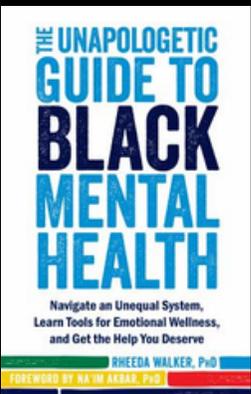
Experiencing pain is the only thing more difficult than exploring it. Take time to get in tune and process your pain.

Learn more about the hidden battles that Black men face everyday.

Learn about vulnerability & bouncing back from shame.

Books are great ways to begin your journey to wellness. You can work *privately, at your own pace, whenever you want.* The key is getting started. Choose one of these books and get going today!

MYCHAL DENZEL SMITH
INVISIBLE MAN, GOT THE WHOLE WORLD WATCHING
A YOUNG BLACK MAN'S EDUCATION



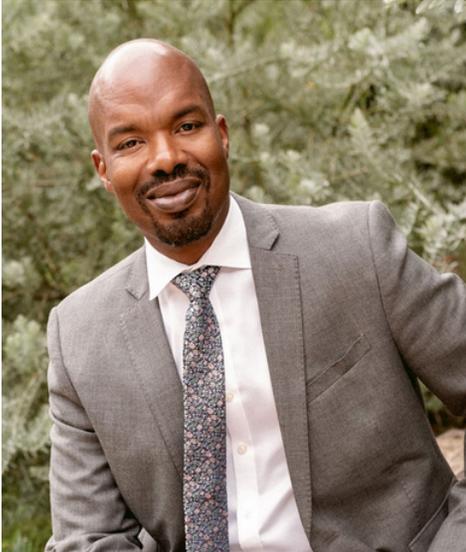
Workbooks help men and boys solve problems.

Guided mental wellness journals provide prompts for men and boys to effectively explore their feelings and thoughts.

Psychology impact Black communities in unique ways.



Mindful Training Solutions, LLC



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