

Improving school mental health for BIPOC girls: A scoping review



Jennifer M. Cooper, PhD, NCSP

INTRODUCTION

- Schools are the primary provider of mental health supports for youth, however, racial disparities in identification, access to services and quality of care, in addition to disproportionate rates of school discipline for Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) youth are well established
- Black girls are subject to adultification bias and experience school pushout leading to increased risk for sexual assault and juvenile justice involvement (Epstein et al., 2019)
- Moreover, little research has focused on the needs and treatment preferences of BIPOC youth, and the mental health needs of BIPOC girls in particular.
- One step to promote effective school mental health services (SMHS) is to recognize BIPOC girls as psychological subjects with important perspectives on the care they are receiving or have failed to receive and improve access to culturally affirming SMHS as an alternative to punitive discipline.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Critical School Mental Health Praxis (Ulie-Wells, 2020)

- Based on Critical Race Theory and Relational Cultural Theory
- Can guide future efforts at the intersection of educational equity and school mental health (see Tables 1 & 2)

METHODS

- Systematic literature searches were conducted by a medical librarian in the electronic databases PubMed, PsycINFO, and ERIC.
- For all databases, both controlled vocabulary and text word searches were performed, using a combination of terms (for full search strategies contact author).

BIPOC girls are understudied and underrepresented in school mental health literature and overrepresented in school discipline data (Epstein et al., 2017)

Table 1. Critical School Mental Health Praxis (CrSMHP) Tenets (Ulie-Wells, 2020)

Tenet 1 - A critical lens is needed to address the root cause of ongoing systemic oppression reproduced through the policies of institutions and the practices of individuals working within them.

Tenet 2 - Intensive professional and personal self-reflection is needed to challenge stereotypes, biases, and expectations that influence the ability to build connected relationships with students.

Tenet 3 - Connected relationships between students and teachers create a culturally-conscious school climate that can prepare young people to be agents of institutional and individual change in their society.

Table 2. CrSMHP Recommendations for Researchers

1. Increase research specifically focusing on how schools impact racially and culturally diverse student mental health using a critical lens
2. Invite persons with racially and culturally diverse backgrounds to research conversations and studies regarding school mental health

METHODS (Cont.'d)

Inclusion criteria included:

- Peer-reviewed article
- Focused on US context
- Studies used qualitative and/or quantitative data
- Focused on BIPOC youth and mental health in schools
- Conducted between 2005 and 2021
- Gray literature sources were excluded
- The author followed the PRISMA reporting guidelines for scoping reviews.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

- Preliminary results are presented in the PRISMA table for the PsycINFO database; others are still being coded.
- Of the articles retained (n=43), only 2 had a specific focus on girls.
- Few studies were analyzed in ways that disaggregated by race, gender, and other demographic variables.
- As a result, we know much less about the specific mental health needs and outcomes among girls and young women of color in schools.
- Effective mental health care for diverse youth must be delivered through frameworks that emphasize cultural humility, trauma-informed practices and be assessed to see if they are effective with diverse youth.
- For example, school-based interventions like the Good Behavior Game, First Steps to Success, Cognitive-Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools, Bounce Back, IPT-A and Penn Resiliency Program have been shown to be efficacious with some diverse youth.
- However, there is virtually no research on the treatment preferences among minority youth (n=2) or the design elements of SMHS that are likely to appeal to girls of color and facilitate their engagement.

