ABSTRACT

The Relationship of Race/Ethnicity and Attitudes Toward Mental Health Service Use Among African American Foster Youth

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METHODS

Research Design

The secondary data for this project were collected through a longitudinal cohort approach conducted through the Washington University’s Human Subjects Committee in St. Louis, Missouri.

Of the original 406 youth, 384 16-17-year-olds were identified as mental health consumers on the basis of self-reported experiences with mental health professionals and items from the Service Assessment for Children and Adolescents (SACA), which measure lifetime mental health service use.

The original study included nine waves, however only questions from the first wave (index) are being used, which measured the youth’s responses to open-ended questions about their attitudes toward seeking professional help for mental health problems as being used for this study.

In addition, data regarding mental health service utilization also gathered during the first wave will be used.

To identify frequencies of attitudes among all the foster youth, positive attitudes were measured by grouping those who responded “agree” and “strongly agree” to the ATSP Help Scale.

Similarly, negative attitudes were measured by grouping those who responded “disagree” or “strongly disagree.” Percentages by each attitude type and within each race were added to calculate a mean.

Sample

The current sampling frame used secondary data from a longitudinal cohort design containing 9 waves approved through the Washington University’s Human Subjects Committee in St. Louis, Missouri.

The initial study employed purposive sampling as the participants selected were those perceptions of a mental health service professional as being used for this study.

Sample consisted of 406 foster 16-17-year-olds.

Overall, the findings revealed that there was no significant correlation between the attitudes of mental health service and mental health service utilization by race/ethnicity.

RESULTS

Research Question:

What differences exist among the attitudes of mental health services among African American foster youth compared to their White counterparts, and do these differences affect mental health utilization?

Hypothesis:

African American foster youth will hold more negative attitudes toward mental health services compared to White foster youth, thus contributing to its underuse.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Most states are not sufficiently meeting the psychological and behavioral needs of children who have been abused or neglected.

Of particular concern are the racial/ethnic disparities that exist within the child welfare system.

Non-Hispanic Whites have repeatedly been shown to receive mental health services at higher rates than their African American counterparts.

The lack of quality services have sparked an interest in obtaining consumer feedback as well as helped establish state level requirements in obtaining such information for quality improvement purposes.

Only do these solicitations offer foster youth an opportunity to provide their attitudes toward their mental treatment experience, rather their parents or caregivers are often surveyed instead.

However, their perceptions are not accurate measures of mental health service quality, particularly because caregiver attitudes do not align with those of the recipients in question – foster youth.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH & POLICY

Future research should examine a broader range of informal and formal sources to better identify help-seeking patterns.

More research on the other factors effecting mental health utilization patterns, such as assessing the power of bias as well as the psychosocial and sociocultural factors that influence the attitudes toward and use of mental health services.

More research on how to adequately assess the quality of culturally appropriate mental health services adopted by the child welfare system.

Efforts made to systematically identify barriers preventing use can help fill the racial disparity gap and discover disparities within the child welfare system.

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