

Mental Health Disparities in Minority Populations

Kristyn L. Watkins

Ellmer School of Nursing, Old Dominion University

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Dr. Beth Tremblay

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A multitude of public health issues are impacted by social justice. Minority groups are disproportionately affected by these social justice issues. The public health issue that I chose to analyze from a social justice perspective is mental health disparities in minority groups. Mental health is a public health issue that has been extremely overlooked, but is now beginning to gain attention. Mental health disparities can be defined as “unfair differences in access to or quality of care according to race and ethnicity” (McGuire & Miranda, 2008). The minority communities are at great risk for poor mental health outcomes due to factors including “inaccessibility of high-quality mental health care services, cultural stigma surrounding mental health care, discrimination, and overall lack of awareness about mental health (American Psychiatric Association, 2023). Minority groups are at increased risk of facing systemic barriers that put them at higher risk of mental illnesses, and also increase the social injustices regarding seeking care. An article written by the American Public Health Association wrote, “More than 30% of direct medical costs faced by U.S. Blacks, Hispanics, and Asian-Americans can be tied to health inequities. That 30% translates to more than \$230 billion over four years, and studies have shown that clinicians tend to have more negative attitudes toward people of color, and unconscious racial bias among clinicians has been shown to lead to poorer communication and lower quality of care” (2021). Mental health is very heavily overlooked within minority populations, especially Blacks, and often shunned. This, along with negative attitudes from clinicians, creates these mental health disparities.

The social justice model, Critical Race Theory, emphasizes racism as being systemic and embedded within policies, laws, and institutions (Hardin, 2025). Mental health disparities in minority groups occur due to systemic racism and some current policies, institutions, and laws, as emphasized by the Critical Race Theory. A policy that was recently passed, called the “One

Big Beautiful Bill Act,” passed on July 4, 2025, cut federal funding for Medicaid by 15%, or \$1 trillion, over 10 years. It has been estimated that these cuts will result in “11.8 million individuals directly losing their health insurance coverage under Medicaid, and an additional roughly 3.1 million people losing Medicaid coverage under marketplace plans” (American Psychological Association, 2025). This will greatly affect behavioral services being included in health care, and make it much more difficult for minorities to have access to mental health care. Affordable healthcare/insurance is another factor impacting medical care. It was determined in 2018 that “black people were 1.5 times more likely to be uninsured; Hispanic people were 2.5 times more likely to be uninsured; and AIAN people were 2.9 times more likely to be uninsured compared to white people” (National Alliance on Mental Illness, 2025).

The public has limited awareness of the underlying disparities deeply rooted in the systemic inequities created by society. Individuals who are being directly impacted by this social injustice have a clearer understanding of its impacts. Without proper education and knowledge, it will be difficult for this social injustice to be resolved. A proposed action in resolving this issue would be expanding access to care, promoting education on systemic inequalities and stigmas, creating a diverse healthcare environment, and working towards reforming the system.

Expanding access to care can be done by implementing and retaining Medicaid expansion and utilizing telehealth and remote patient monitoring (AMA, 2025). Supporting Medicaid expansion will allow for more individuals, especially those in minority groups, to have access to medical care. Behavioral health is not covered on some insurance plans, so it is important to advocate for this as part of much-needed health care. Utilizing telehealth and remote patient monitoring will allow for access to care in underserved or rural areas. Reforming the justice system starts individually. This can be accomplished by advocating and supporting programs

such as the Affordable Care Act in aiding to reform this health disparity. The Commonwealth Fund uses a tool to “track health and health care in each state, seeking both to understand how the policy choices we make affect people’s health outcomes and to motivate the change needed to improve the health of all communities across the United States” (Radley et al., 2024). A goal they created that can be useful in reforming mental health disparities in minorities is for health system leaders, policymakers, and community stakeholders to use their tool in investigating the current impacts on minority populations.

A diverse medical environment has been proven to improve patient care and health outcomes. Research has shown links to “greater healthcare workforce diversity with increased innovation, improved risk assessments and communication, and better healthcare system financial performance and patient outcomes” (Mosley et al, 2025). It is also very important to educate parents, family members, and people directly in minority groups on the severity of mental health issues. Mental health is often seen as a weakness in the Black community and is not taken seriously by some parents/guardians. Due to this, only one in three African Americans who struggle with mental health issues will ever receive appropriate treatment (White, 2019). These individuals and families must be educated on the importance of mental health and begin taking it seriously.

Health disparities are present throughout the United States. Being educated on systemic effects, social determinants of health, and societal impacts is key to resolving this issue. Mental health is overlooked by so many; unfortunately, it was finally taken seriously due to the high suicide rates throughout the country. Minorities are at greater risk of these mental health disparities due to a lack of financial stability and insurance coverage, socioeconomic barriers, lack of quality healthcare, and language/cultural barriers. The contents of this paper have helped

me understand the severity of this social justice issue. Though it is not something that I currently struggle with, thousands of people are at risk of self-harming due to a lack of access and support. It is imperative for a change to be made, and it starts with you.

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Appendix

Dear Jennifer Tackett,

My name is Kristyn Watkins, and I am a fourth-semester student enrolled in the Ellmer School of Nursing at Old Dominion University. For my community health class, I was tasked with identifying a public health issue from a social justice paper, and I chose to write about mental health disparities within the minority population. I am reaching out and writing this letter to you regarding one of the publication journals, “Mechanisms of Mental-Health Disparities Among Minoritized Groups: How Well Are the Top Journals in Clinical Psychology Representing This Work”. After researching and writing my paper, I realized how under-researched mental health disparities in minority populations are. I concluded that this may be due to the implications of structural racism and the lack of research regarding minority communities. Within the recommendations section of the paper, I also think it would be important for future researchers to evaluate interventions that have been implemented to resolve mental health disparities in minorities. If more interventions proved to be successful statistically in journal publication articles, then it may be easier for this public health issue to begin resolving. Research can also be beneficial in educating the public on the severity of this issue.

