

# **THE CHRISTIAN MENTAL HEALTH INITIATIVE: INCREASING MENTAL HEALTH LITERACY AMONG BLACK CHURCH LEADERS**

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## **Background**

According to the Pew Research Center, approximately 80% of Black Americans identify as Christian. Studies suggest that the majority of Black Christians seek counsel from church leaders rather than mental health clinicians in times of psychological distress. However, church leaders' training focuses on spiritual health not mental health.

## **Aims/Objectives/Issues of Focus**

This study aims to bridge the gap between faith and mental health by providing Black church leaders Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training. MHFA is an evidence-based eight-hour course in mental health emergency response training. The goal of this study is to assess the efficacy of MHFA to increase the mental health literacy of Black church leaders and increase Black church leaders' willingness to refer congregants to mental health resources.

## **Methods/Proposition**

The study aims to expand on the use of MHFA as an educational intervention within Black Christian churches. We seek to recruit approximately 200 Gospel Hall and/or Brethren church leaders in the Greater Philadelphia area to participate in the MHFA workshop. Attendees will complete brief pre-and post-intervention surveys to assess their knowledge of mental illnesses and their willingness to refer church members to mental health resources.

## **Results/Potential Outcomes**

We hypothesize that Black church leaders will report increased knowledge of mental illness and an increased willingness to refer church members to mental health resources. Additionally, we hypothesize that Black church attendees will report increased understanding of mental illnesses and increased willingness to refer church members to mental health resources.

## **Discussion/Implications**

Through low-cost initiatives like MHFA workshops, Black church leaders can learn to direct their congregants to the appropriate level of psychiatric and psychological care. Educating Black Christian leaders on mental illness and local mental health resources may, in turn, increase the utilization of mental health services amongst Black persons with mental illness in times of psychological distress.

## **Full List of Authors**

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## **Learning Objectives**

At the conclusion of this presentation, participants will be able to:

1. Identify the need to increase mental health training for Black church leaders

2. Recognize the role of Mental Health First Aid in providing basic mental training to the general public