

EXPLORING INTERSECTIONALITY IN ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH THROUGH THE LENS OF YOUTH COLLABORATORS

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Background: Adolescents are in a critical period of identity formation. Youth with marginalized identities, such as LGBTQ+ and racial minorities, face greater mental health challenges than their non-marginalized peers. Youth mental health challenges evolve with cultural change and may not be adequately assessed with non-youth designed surveys. Rather, empowering youth in the research process promotes exploration of pertinent community needs.

Aim: To highlight youth mental health challenges in the intersectionality between race, gender, and sexuality with a youth-driven, community-designed survey.

Methods: Nineteen adolescents, three youth community leaders, and the research team collaboratively designed a mental health survey with 20 survey objectives and 148 questions. The survey was administered at five high schools from April to June 2021. Outcomes in this study include depression, anxiety, suicidal thought, pandemic-related mental health, social media-related mental health, mental health stigma, and feeling unsafe at home during the pandemic. Subgroups of race, gender, and sexuality were analyzed with the χ^2 test ($\alpha=0.05$) and odds ratio.

Results: Mental health surveys were received from 120 high school students. In the race by gender analysis, being female significantly increased experiencing all outcomes with Hispanic females having the highest number of the outcomes listed. In the race by sexuality analysis, being LGBTQ+ significantly increased suicidal thought, worsening pandemic-related-mental health, and not feeling safe at home with Latinx LGBTQ+ youth most likely to experience these outcomes. Latinx and LGBTQ+ youth experience less negative mental health outcomes from social media than their counterparts.

Discussion: This study identified greater mental health challenges for marginalized youth identities which were amplified with intersectionality. Online communities may act as a safe space for marginalized youth to connect. Further community-engaged work with youth input is essential to design effective tools for youth mental health, especially in marginalized groups.

Full List of Authors

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Learning Objectives

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

1. Identify mental health challenges among marginalized youth identities.
2. Plan a community-driven research approach to investigating youth mental health.