



## Students Engage in Anti-Stigma Work through a Culturally Relevant and Comprehensive Mental Health Workshop and Website

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Historical oppression contributes to ongoing trauma and socioeconomic disparities. These can lead to poor physical and mental health. A growing 5.2 million Black Americans a year experience a mental health issue, but almost 70% do not receive treatment

([SAMHSA, 2019](#)). Black Americans are significantly less likely to receive needed mental health treatment than White Americans



Figure 1 Photograph by Andrea Piacquadio from Pexels. CCO.

([Terlizzi et al., 2019](#)).

Untreated mental illness leads to more chronic mental and physical health problems ([Healthy People 2020, n.d.](#)). Systemic oppression and racism continue to manifest. A history of misdiagnosis, negative treatment, and a lack of access to affordable and culturally competent resources contribute to stigma about mental health issues, making it harder to pursue treatment ([Mental Health America, n.d.](#)). Health disparities are likely to further result from COVID-19 impacts and related physical distancing measures that keep many Black people separated from communities of support.

A Community Psychology graduate student started *Students for Community Resilience*. The goal of this group is to decrease mental health stigma and increase knowledge about mental illness and treatment, dementia and caregiving, and self- and community-care in a COVID-19 world wrestling with racism.

### Highlights

***Students for Community Resilience* developed and delivered a community-informed virtual interactive workshop and website in Southwest Atlanta.**

**Students can take advantage of curriculum requirements (e.g. practicum) to apply their skills to community settings, initiate relationships, and make a real impact over time.**

*One Neighborhood at a Time* was a partnership between Students for Community Resilience (SCR) and Atlanta City Neighborhood Planning Unit I (NPU-I), a forum for a predominantly Black community in Southwest Atlanta comprised of 21,310 people. The project included an initial 15-minute virtual presentation at the monthly NPU-I meeting to engage the community around the importance of mental health and assess interest and need. SCR then collaborated to develop and deliver an evidence-based 1.5 hour long interactive virtual workshop for Atlanta City NPU-I. The workshop sought to increase knowledge about mental health, illness, and treatment, including dementia and caregiving, decreasing mental health stigma, and promote knowledge and motivation around self- and community-care and activism related to mental health. The workshop was informed by live community polling, local culture (e.g. mentoring by community leaders), and relevant research literature on community engagement and mental health and stigma in the Black community. The event incorporated culturally-relevant engagement through interactive chats, and presented a resource website.

### ***Methods***

Initial community interest was assessed through an introduction to the workshop and used to inform the workshop and website content. During the workshop, participants completed a pre- and post- assessment of stigma, knowledge, and motivation. Website engagement will continue to be monitored, and viewers are encouraged to provide new resource ideas and website feedback via an anonymous questionnaire hosted on the site.

### ***Results***

- Since IRB review was not sought, findings cannot be presented in detail. However, initial interest in a partnership between student-activists and the community was promising. The virtual workshop had good attendance and engagement.
- The development of a culturally-relevant and comprehensive website to help Black Atlantans learn about mental health and locate accessible and culturally-competent mental health treatment and support was useful. Community-informed development and delivery of workshops can continue beyond the initial scope of this project.

## **HOW DID A COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY PERSPECTIVE INFORM YOUR WORK?**

Community Psychology emphasizes partnering with community members to address community-designated needs. This project established an ongoing partnership and resulted in the development of content that can be used in future collaborations. Further, the project began to address a community issue that results from systemic inadequacies by identifying local, accessible, and culturally-relevant information and resources.

## What Does This Mean For?

**Research and Evaluation:** Live polling and participant engagement via virtual presentations can be a tool for research, as can website engagement.

**Practice:** The use of new virtual tools can supplement in-person focus groups to collect community perspectives in the development and evaluation of programs. Yet, limited access to technology may inhibit a thoroughly representative response. This could be supplemented through engagement via direct mail campaigns and phone interviews and focus groups.

**Social Action:** Social action does not happen from the outside, but outsiders can help inform, empower, and equip community members for social action through targeted partnerships with existing community entities. In this case, working with NPU-I allowed engagement with an audience already active in civic affairs. Often, information and resource dissemination may be a key tool for promoting social action.

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