Centre for
Mental Health

Young Black men's mental health during Covid-19

Experiences from the Shifting the Dial project

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Summary

The coronavirus pandemic continues to pose a major threat to the world. But rather than acting as a great equaliser, Covid-19 has exposed and amplified existing inequalities in our society. Young Black men are one such group who have faced historic and appalling injustices. Many of the challenges they face have a devastating impact on their mental health and wellbeing.

The Shifting the Dial partnership is a collaboration involving Birmingham Repertory Theatre, Centre for Mental Health, First Class Foundation and Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust, seeking to promote the mental health of young Black men in Birmingham. The partnership has been growing increasingly concerned about the negative impact of the crisis on young Black men's mental health.

Emerging evidence highlights the unequal effects of Covid-19 on young Black men across a range of areas in their lives:

- Research suggests that men from racialised backgrounds are reporting higher levels of mental distress during the pandemic compared to white men (Proto *et al.*, 2021). Contributing factors include bereavement, loneliness and worries about coronavirus and misinformation.

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- Young people's education has been severely disrupted by the crisis and evidence suggests it is widening inequalities, particularly for already disadvantaged pupils. Existing racial bias within the education system has previously contributed to young Black men being excluded at higher rates and has led to the under-predicting of grades. There are concerns that these disparities could worsen during the crisis.

- Young Black men aged 16-25 are amongst the hardest hit by job losses and more likely to report a fall in income because of lockdown.

- Covid-19 enforcement and policing are disproportionately affecting young Black men. They are much more likely to be stopped and searched and issued fines for breaching lockdown measures. This disproportionality existed prior to the crisis and has been shown to fuel mistrust and impact on wellbeing.

- The latest wave of the Black Lives Matter movement has brought into focus the ways in which mainstream mental health services fail Black people as a result of structural racism and discrimination.

It is evident that young Black men have been hit from all sides throughout this pandemic. The Government must take urgent action to tackle the inequalities they face and improve their life chances.

A note on terminology

We recognise that the language used by academia, services and policy to talk about race and ethnicity can be problematic. It can create further barriers to having open and honest conversations about racism and the impact it has on people and our wider society. For the purposes of this report, we have aimed to be specific wherever possible, rather than using homogenising terminology. Where we are referring to multiple communities who experience racial inequality, we have used the term 'racialised communities'. However, this briefing also cites multiple sources of research, many of which have used other labels or categorisations. In these situations, we have used their chosen terms, with inverted commas.

Where we refer to Young Black men, this refers to young men of Black African and Black Caribbean descent.

About the Shifting the Dial programme

Shifting the Dial is a ground-breaking 3-year programme seeking to promote positive mental health among young African Caribbean men aged 16-25 in Birmingham, generously funded by The National Lottery Community Fund.

The partnership consists of Birmingham Repertory Theatre, Centre for Mental Health, First Class Foundation and NHS Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health Foundation Trust. The programme launched in 2018. There are three broad aims of Shifting the Dial:

1. To co-produce, with young African Caribbean men:

   • Ways of promoting their resilience and wellbeing

   • Ways of promoting improved opportunities for young men

   • Ways of influencing local and national system change

2. To increase the numbers of young men working in community health settings

3. To decrease mental health stigma and improve community support for young men.

Further information can be found here: **https://www.birmingham-rep.co.uk/get-involved/creative-development/shifting-the-dial.html**

Introduction

The coronavirus pandemic (Covid-19) has changed the world as we know it. At the time of writing, more than 100,000 people in the UK have died from the virus. On top of the devastating risks and outcomes associated with the virus itself, the crisis is having a wider impact on our society. This includes socio-economic and educational costs as well as adverse effects on mental and physical health. The evidence to date also suggests that Covid-19 does not affect all population groups equally. Age, ethnicity and occupation have all been among the identified risk factors (Public Health England, 2020).

Young Black men have distinct experiences and faced a range of inequalities even before the pandemic started. These are apparent across health, education, employment and within the criminal justice system.

This briefing summarises the available evidence and draws on insights from the Shifting the Dial programme, which is working to boost the mental health of young Black men in Birmingham.

The Shifting the Dial partnership is concerned that these compounding inequalities are likely to result in a national pandemic response that does not sufficiently address their needs. The partnership is calling for urgent action to prioritise the mental health and wellbeing of young Black men and mitigate against the disproportionate impacts of Covid-19.

This review of evidence was conducted between January and February 2021 and reflects the latest data and information regarding Covid-19 at the time of writing.

The health and wellbeing of young Black men

Young Black men's health and wellbeing has been severely affected by the Covid-19 crisis and lockdown measures.

Mental health

The pandemic is having a significant impact on the nation's mental health (Wilton, 2020). Centre for Mental Health estimates that approximately 10 million people, including 1.5 million children, are likely to need new or additional mental health support as a direct result of the crisis (O'Shea, 2020).

Evidence also suggests that the pandemic is exacerbating existing mental health inequalities. People living with mental health problems have been struggling to access support. The unequal effects of the pandemic and lockdown on racialised communities are also contributing to a decline in mental health in those same communities (Allwood and Bell, 2020).

Emerging research indicates that young Black men's mental health may be more acutely affected. This has led to claims that 'Black men's mental health is the next pandemic' due to the pre-existing and growing inequalities and risk factors they face (Holmes, 2020).

Research by the University of Exeter found that men from racialised communities have been hardest hit by the crisis. According to the study, men from 'Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds' reported a 14% deterioration in mental health while white males reported 6.5% (Proto et al., 2021).

"The number of concerns raised for young people's mental health has increased significantly, and steadily, as lockdowns continue amongst our participatory groups, but their most serious safeguarding concern was for the wellbeing of an African Caribbean participant" – **Shifting the Dial partner, project lead**

Data released by Kooth, an online counselling platform, reveals that the proportion of young people aged 11-25 from racialised backgrounds seeking mental health support from their service has increased significantly since the start of the first lockdown. Self-reported depression increased by 9.2% during lockdown, while for white young people it decreased by 16.2% among those using the platform. In addition, self-reported suicidal thoughts among young people from 'Black and Minority Ethnic' backgrounds increased at a greater rate than their white counterparts (Kooth, 2020).

"Being in lockdown has felt like being a Category D prisoner" – **Shifting the Dial peer researcher**

Bereavement and grief

Black communities in the UK are twice as likely to contract Covid-19 compared to white people (Sze *et al.*, 2020). As of June 2020, Black men were more than 3 times more likely to die from Covid-19 than white men their age (ONS, 2020a).

A survey carried out by the Runnymede Trust found that nearly one in five (19%) people from Black African and Black Caribbean backgrounds said they knew someone who had died of the virus by June 2020 (Runnymede Trust, 2020).

Dealing with loss and grief has been extremely challenging for the Black community. Many families have been unable to visit their dying relatives or hold traditional funerals or ceremonies as a result of the lockdown. This has made the grieving process even more difficult and complex, including for young Black men. It has also exposed the lack of culturally appropriate bereavement support.

BAMEStream is a recently established alliance of individuals and organisations seeking to bring the mental health needs of racialised communities during the pandemic to the to the fore. The group conducted a national study of the provision of mental health and bereavement support. According to the study, 41 out of 101 'Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic' led organisations they surveyed reported an increase in demand for support relating to isolation, anxiety, stress and common mental

health difficulties as a result of the pandemic (Murray, 2020). Many of these issues related to experiences of bereavement and grief. The study also reported that both 'BAME' led and mainstream mental health providers acknowledged a lack of cultural competency in their work.

Loneliness

While social distancing is required to prevent the spread of Covid-19, research suggests it is also fuelling loneliness and isolation and that this may be affecting young Black people more than other groups. Analysis conducted by the Office for National Statistics suggests that young people aged 16-24 years were more likely to have experienced lockdown loneliness (50.8%) than older people aged 55 to 69 years (24.1%) (ONS, 2020b).

According to a study by the Runnymede Trust, 14% of adults in Britain reported that "social isolation is making relationships at home more difficult than usual". This figure was higher within 'ethnic minority' groups, at nearly one in five (Runnymede Trust, 2020).

Fear and false information regarding Covid-19

Since the outbreak of coronavirus, false information surrounding the virus has spread rapidly. One largescale US study investigating misinformation related to Covid-19 found that young people aged 18-24 were most likely to believe false claims compared to older generations (Baum *et al.*, 2020).

In the initial stages of the pandemic, misinformation regarding the virus and the Black community was rife – for example, myths about Black people being immune from coronavirus. These fuelled feelings of fear and worry amongst the Black community, that family and friends could feel a false sense of security and therefore be at greater risk of contracting and spreading the virus. Furthermore, the lack of targeted and accessible communication about the virus and its symptoms is likely to have contributed to the confusion and uncertainty during this period, according to a review by Public Health England (Public Health England, 2020). These findings must be understood within the context of present-day and historic structural racism in health care which has led to a lack of trust from racialised communities.

Many of the myths were swiftly debunked (Vary, 2020) but the proliferation of false information has persisted online. This is believed to be a driving factor in higher rates of Covid-19 vaccine hesitancy amongst racialised communities. Recent analysis of the UK Household Longitudinal Survey suggests that vaccine hesitancy is highest amongst Black people at almost three-quarters (72%) (Robertson *et al.*, 2021). Work is currently underway to address this to help increase uptake.

Education

Our previous report *Against the odds* highlighted the strong links between young Black men's educational outcomes and their mental health. The challenges and prejudices Black boys and young men face within the British education system have been well-documented for decades, yet they continue unabated. Covid-19 is likely to further jeopardise their learning.

The closure of educational institutions has severely disrupted young people's learning, but evidence suggests that it may be impacting more on young Black pupils than on other groups.

Exams and attainment

A study tracking the experiences of around 62,000 pupils by ImpactEd found that pupils taking GCSEs and A-level assessments have faced the greatest challenges during Covid-19, and that young people in these important stages reported the lowest wellbeing scores (Schoolsweek, 2021).

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) raised concerns about learning losses and the widening of the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their

peers. The reported gap, based upon teacher estimates, has increased by 46% in a year (Sharp et al., 2020).

In 2020, exceptional arrangements were put in place to assess and award grades to pupils sitting their GCSEs and A-level examinations. A standardisation model was abandoned in favour of teacher-based assessments following public outcry due to the initial downgrading of over 40% of A-level results taken that year (Guardian, 2020a).

While this was a positive decision, it should be noted that the use of teacher-predicted grades presents challenges for Black pupils due to racial bias in the education system. Previous research by the education thinktank LKMco found that non-Black teachers often have lower expectations of Black British students (Millard et al., 2018). Subsequently, Black pupils are much more likely to have incorrectly estimated predicted grades (Cowan et al., 2020). Indeed, Black A-level pupils in 2011 had the lowest percentage accuracy with only 39.1% of grades accurately predicted (Everett et al., 2011).

A consultation ran in January 2021 on how GCSE, AS and A-level grades should be awarded in summer 2021 (Ofqual, 2021).

Exclusions

Research by the University of Exeter suggests that school exclusions and poor mental health are closely linked and can contribute to one another (Ford et al., 2018). School exclusions are highest amongst Black pupils and those from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds. Black Caribbean pupils are three times as likely to be permanently excluded compared to their white counterparts (Department for Education, 2020).

The levels of fixed-term exclusions in English schools reached a record high in 2018-2019, up 7% from the previous year and rising consistently for the past five years (Schools Week, 2020). There are concerns that exclusions may continue to rise in some parts of the country.

Insights gathered by Ofsted as part of their 'interim visits' of schools during the pandemic found that very occasionally, school leaders reported that rates of fixed-term exclusions were rising (Ofsted, 2020). School leaders explained that this was often due to challenges around implementing their usual behaviour management measures, such as the use of isolation, or because of practicalities around space restrictions (Ofsted, 2020).

Employment and finances

Young Black men's livelihoods have been profoundly affected by Covid-19. The pandemic risks putting them in an even more precarious position in our society.

A survey carried out by the charity Mind found that existing inequalities in housing, employment, finances and other areas had a greater impact on the mental health of people from 'Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic' groups than white people during the coronavirus pandemic (Mind, 2020). For example, one in three people from 'Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic' groups said problems with their housing impacted on their mental health, compared to nearly one in four white people. Employment worries impacted 61% of people from 'Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic' groups, compared to 51% of white people.

Unemployment

Young Black men faced huge challenges in the labour market even before the pandemic, consistently reporting high levels of unemployment. Among young people aged 16-24, 27% of young Black people were unemployed in the year July 2019-June 2020 compared to a rate of 10% for young white people of the same age group (House of Commons Library, 2020).

Emerging evidence suggests that the coronavirus pandemic is worsening employment opportunities for young Black men and is likely to increase their rate of unemployment.

Research undertaken by the Institute for Employment Studies found that nearly half of

young people (46%) under the age of 24 have reported an overall fall in employment since the pandemic. Similarly, young people under 24 make up 47% of people furloughed. The fall in employment is having a disproportionate impact on young people from racialised communities, with the rate being four times higher for young Black people than young white people (Wilson and Papoutsaki, 2021). Economic instability in the long term is likely to have the biggest impact on young Black men. Indeed, research suggests that Black men aged 16-24 overall tend to face disproportionately high levels of unemployment during periods of economic turmoil, at times reaching over 40%; three to four times as high as for their white counterparts (Li *et al.*, 2020).

Findings from the Prince's Trust's *Youth Index 2021* show that more than half of young people (60%) feel that getting a new job feels "impossible now" because of increased competition and a quarter (24%) of young people aged 16-25 felt that the pandemic has "destroyed" their career aspirations (Prince's Trust, 2021).

Finances

Our previous research has also shown a strong link between the economic pressures on young Black men and their mental health and wellbeing (Khan, 2017). The pandemic is likely to heighten their money worries and concerns.

A survey conducted by the London School of Economics and the University of Exeter found that nearly six in ten young people aged 16-25 had reported a loss in their earnings since the pandemic began (London School of Economics, 2020).

The Runnymede Trust suggests that 'Black and Minority Ethnic' people are much more likely than white people to have experienced the negative financial impact of Covid-19. Those from Black African backgrounds were more likely to report the loss of income since the pandemic; the rate was 38% for Black Africans, compared with 21% of Black Caribbean groups and 22% of white British people (Runnymede Trust, 2020). People from 'Black and Minority Ethnic' communities were also less aware of economic measures to support individuals during Covid-19, including the ability to claim universal credit, statutory sick pay or access the furlough scheme. For example, 88% of white people had heard of the furlough scheme compared to 69% of people from 'Black and Minority Ethnic' backgrounds (Runnymede Trust, 2020).

Policing during the pandemic

Young Black men have historically been criminalised and continue to be overrepresented in the criminal justice system, despite often presenting with high and unmet mental health needs. Numerous reviews and inquiries, including the Lammy Review in 2017, have highlighted the disproportionate numbers of young Black men and boys at all stages of the system, yet they continue to rise (Robertson *et al.*, 2020).

In addition to this, Black people are much more likely to report being unfairly stopped or unfairly treated by the police. For example, a recent poll conducted for the Joint Committee on Human Rights in the summer of 2020 found that the overwhelming majority (85%) of Black people in the UK are not confident that they would be treated the same as a white person by the police (JCHR, 2020).

The disproportionality young Black men experience has continued and even worsened in some areas of policing during the pandemic. Analysis released by National Police Chiefs' Council examining the enforcement of coronavirus guidelines between March and May 2020 found that police were twice as likely to

fine young 'Black, Asian and minority ethnic' men (aged 18-24) for breaching lockdown regulations than white men of the same age (NPCC, 2020).

In the financial year 2018-19, there were four stop and search cases for every 1,000 white people, compared with 38 for every 1,000 Black people (Home Office, 2020a). The rates of stop and searches in the year 2019-20 increased significantly, rising by 52% compared to the previous year. The Metropolitan Police accounted for half of the increase in stop and searches during this period (Home Office, 2020b).

There has been a surge of stop and searches of young Black men during the pandemic and lockdown period. For example, a study undertaken by University College London found that young Black men aged 18-24 in London were 19 times more likely to be stopped and searched compared to the overall population (Ashby, 2020). Analysis by the Home Affairs

Committee found that in the month of May 2020 alone, around one in ten Black boys and young men aged 15-25 were stopped and searched (Guardian, 2020b). More than 80% of these incidents resulted in no further action.

While young Black men continue to be overpoliced, they remain under-protected, even during lockdown. They continue to be exposed to criminal exploitation and are at greater risk of serious youth violence. While there has, for the first time, been an overall 5% decrease in referrals to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) – the framework used to identify potential victims of modern slavery (including internal trafficking) – between April and June 2020, more referrals were received for child victims (58%) than adults (38%), while the age group of the remaining 4% of cases were unknown (Home Office, 2020c). Cases involving criminal exploitation accounted for nearly one in five (19%) referrals over this period and the majority of these referrals (85%) were made for boys.

Black Lives Matter

The devastating killings of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd and many others sparked the world's largest civil rights movement in 2020 in solidarity with Black Lives Matter. It represented a historic turning point for race relations and racial justice, not just in the US but here in the UK, too.

People around the world mobilised and demanded change amidst an ongoing pandemic. In the UK, the message was clear: 'the UK is not innocent'. For too long, systemic racism has persisted, stripping Black people of their rights and dignity. Black people have endured racial violence, often from the very institutions that should be offering support and protection.

Young Black people across the country made their voices heard loud and clear, reflecting on their own experiences of racism and demanding change. A report by YMCA, *Young and Black*, revealed that almost all young Black people (95%) have heard and witnessed racist

language during their time at school, and more than three quarters have heard and witnessed racist language in the workplace. Many also said that they now grow up expecting to experience racism because of the colour of their skin (YMCA, 2020).

Young Black men involved in Shifting the Dial also shared their reflections on the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement and what it means to them:

"[I had] a lot of confusion, my mind was everywhere...did it have to take this one moment [the killing of George Floyd] for everyone to recognise Black Lives Matter?!"

Another young man "had to come off social media" because he felt "the situation was so taxing and overwhelming and what's happening in life?"

Our peer researcher reflected: "It saddened me." He was upset that people didn't understand and he felt conflicted about whether

he should feel upset, since white people denounce BLM with points such as "what about black-on-black crime?".

When BLM became more high-profile on social media, one young man explained that he lost a lot of friends. "Seeing my white friends unfollow me because I called them out on their insensitivity and misinformation [about racism]", he realised they "are not down with you like that – and so he "had to 'cut them off'".

By contrast, Shifting the Dial could give a stable source of support which felt genuine and lasting: "I liked FCF [First Class Foundation]'s consistency even before the lockdown or BLM [Black Lives Matter] so I know they weren't doing it for a trend."

Another young person joined First Class Foundation during the period of Black Lives Matter and the George Floyd protests because he 'was looking for something positive in light of this'. The young man said "Staying in that [positive] mentality and coming across what [the Project Lead] was putting on here, it was definitely needed."

In response to the Black Lives Matter movement and ethnic disparities in Covid-19, the Government established a Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities chaired by Dr Tony Sewell. The Commission is due to report its findings in 2021.

The mental health impact of Black Lives Matter

The video footage showing the brutal killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officers flooded social media and the news. While the footage presented crucial evidence, watching the brutalisation of his body presented a 'quiet trauma' for Black people – also known as vicarious traumatisation (Vulture, 2020). This meant that many Black people relived their own experiences or encounters of violence, especially racially motivated violence.

A BBC news article explored how the death of George Floyd affected the mental health of young black men in the UK (Price, 2020). The men featured in the article noted they felt isolated, distraught, lost and exhausted. Overall, the incident took a toll on their mental health. The article also reported that the Black, African and Asian Therapy Network, which signposts people to therapists from these backgrounds, had seen an increase in people accessing their list of free counselling services since June 2020.

The Black Lives Matter movement highlighted the various ways Black people have been underserved by mental health services, despite the high and likely growing levels of need.

Black people are much more likely to come into contact with mental health services through involuntary routes. For example, Black people are four times more likely to be detained under the Mental Health Act than white people (NHS Digital, 2020). Black young people are also twice as likely to be referred to mental health support via court orders, either social care or criminal court orders (Anna Freud Centre & UCL, 2019).

Research shows that at age 11, young Black boys are not any more likely to be identified with a diagnosable mental health problem (Khan, 2017). This poses the question, why is it that by the time they become young adults, they are more likely to be identified as being in mental health crisis? And why are they overrepresented in restrictive settings?

There is currently no evidence to suggest that race and ethnicity themselves are risk factors for poor mental health (Ahmadzadeh, 2021), so we need to better understand how racism and discrimination across the mental health system might be preventing equitable access to care and support.

The Shifting the Dial programme (see page 3) is seeking radical transformation of mental health support for young Black men, including the provision of upstream initiatives that aim to promote positive mental health.

How has the Shifting the Dial programme adapted to the pandemic?

The Covid-19 crisis has changed the way the Shifting the Dial delivery partners, LightPost Theatre Company and First Class Foundation, operated. The closure of face-to-face and non-essential services forced the projects to find new ways of working and to pivot services online.

The projects were quick to adapt and began offering remote and tailored support using Zoom virtual conferencing services. This was because the projects were already making good use of digital platforms prior to the pandemic to continue to engage young Black men.

Young men shared their reflections on the move towards online sessions:

"*It was still effective and bare [lots of] gems were getting dropped in the zoom session, the only difference was missing the energy of being in person, there were a lot of people that came to the physical ones and a range of people that would not necessarily come online.*"

"*I finished university, the sessions added structure to my day and I've been meaning to go [attend the session in person], with it moving online, it meant I could attend more easily.*"

Online sessions were good because it benefitted those who didn't want to travel out, or those who were introverted: "*I felt like online reached more people.*"

Lightpost Theatre Company continued to offer access to their physical rehearsal space when changes to government guidance would allow.

"*We were glad to see the importance of 'support groups' recognised amongst exceptions to lockdown restrictions.*" – **Lightpost Theatre Company project lead**

Using digital forums to bring the community together

In response to the growing concerns following the early outbreak of coronavirus, First Class Foundation organised a series of virtual forums with public health experts, politicians and other community leaders to forge a better dialogue between system leaders, young Black men and the wider Black community in Birmingham. These forums provided young Black men the opportunity to voice concerns and challenge decision-making. For example, the Director of Public Health for Birmingham City Council joined a conversation about the impact of Covid-19 on Black communities and responded to the community's questions.

Following the death of George Floyd in June 2020, the Shifting the Dial partnership came together to plan and curate a series of online sessions entitled 'Fix it – Time to breathe' to learn, share and look at effective approaches from the innovative Shifting the Dial programme. Three events were delivered, each focusing on the themes of:

• Trauma

• Justice and rights

• Healing.

Various professionals attended the events including mental health professionals, teachers, commissioners, police representatives, service managers and community leaders. The sessions concluded with attendees making pledges to take forward actions individually and on behalf of their organisation to address systemic racism and support young Black men. The Shifting the Dial partnership will continue to monitor and review these.

Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust launched a weekly programme on Unity FM, (93.5FM) called 'What Shape Are You In?' in 2018. The programme seeks to promote mental health awareness in the community, tackle stigma and provide local signposting opportunities. The programme is led by the Shifting the Dial project lead for the Trust. Throughout the pandemic, the programme has been providing health and safety information about Covid-19, how to protect your mental health during lockdown and leading conversations about Black Lives Matter.

Conclusion

Prior to the Covid-19 crisis, young Black men were facing multiple challenges and inequalities that meant they were often not seen nor treated as valued members of society.

The evidence shows the ongoing pandemic is intensifying many of the issues in their lives, threatening their mental health and jeopardising their life chances. Research suggests that across many key areas, the disparities faced by young Black men are widening. This includes their mental health, educational outcomes, and employment prospects. Young Black men's relations with the police are also getting significantly worse.

The Covid-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement have been described as a 'dual pandemic', bringing into sharp focus the unique and troubling experiences of Black and other racialised communities. While these events present a crucial opportunity to transform provisions for young Black men, they are at risk of being pushed further into the margins unless concerted action is taken now.

Recommendations

Mental health support

1. The newly established NHS Race and Health Observatory should undertake an urgent deep dive into the impact of Covid-19 on young Black men's mental health and wellbeing.

2. NHS England should ensure the unique experiences and engagement preferences of young Black men are considered as part of the development of the Patient and Carer Race Equality Framework (PCREF) and implementation of the NHS Advancing Mental Health Equalities Strategy.

3. The Department of Health and Social Care should invest in community-based and culturally competent bereavement support for Black young people.

4. Organisations seeking to work in partnership with Black communities should invest time and effort in developing trusting relationships when working 'arm in arm'. And larger scale organisations working with smaller racialised groups should actively involve them in planning, decision-making and review processes.

5. The youth mental health services workforce should reflect the communities they serve and ensure values of anti-racism, diversity and inclusion are promoted. This includes the wider children and young people's workforce, such as education, children's services, public health, criminal justice and the voluntary and community sector.

6. Mental health services should create community healing spaces for young Black men to enable them to process the challenges they face as a result of the pandemic. These spaces could be facilitated online and offline.

Education

7. The Department for Education should provide Black boys and young men with intensive and targeted support to reverse learning loss as a result of the pandemic.

8. Ofqual should monitor and put in place mechanisms to ensure there is a fair process in place for GCSE and A-level exam assessments and gradings in 2021 that does not hamper young Black men's progress.

9. The Department for Education should introduce a moratorium on school exclusions during the pandemic so that pupils, Black boys in particular, are not being sanctioned when they need support most.

Policing

10. The Home Office should urgently review the policing of young Black men during the pandemic.

Employment

11. The Department for Work and Pensions should prioritise the recruitment of young people facing inequalities, including young Black men, as part of the Kickstart Programme.

12. The Department should also seek to increase employment opportunities and outcomes for young Black men in the long-term.

13. In relation to these recommendations, the Department must ensure the robust collection, monitoring and use of ethnicity data to identify gaps and inform decision-making.

Cross-government action

14. The Government must commit to tackling all forms of racism, discrimination and exclusion. This should include action to address the specific injustices faced by young Black men across health, education, employment and criminal justice systems.

15. The Government should work in partnership with Black-led organisations to disseminate information about Covid-19 to the community.

16. Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services, HMI Prisons, HMI Probation, Ofsted and CQC should undertake a joint thematic inspection to explore how public services have worked with young Black men during the pandemic.

Acknowledgements

Resources and information

- Centre for Mental Health. *This is Me guide: A handy guide for schools to help young black men thrive*

  https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/publications/me

- Time to Change, Mind and Rethink Mental Health. *300 Voices Toolkit 'Better must come: Towards hope': To help improve the outcomes of young African and Caribbean men in inpatient mental health services*.

  An engagement model specifically designed for mental health professionals and the police, *300 Voices* incorporates appreciative inquiry, restorative justice, and storytelling in an easy-to-follow, non-judgmental framework for change.

  https://www.time-to-change.org.uk/sites/default/files/Time%20to%20change%20-%20300%20Voices%20Toolkit%20comp.pdf

- First Class Foundation: #DEARYOUNGERS programme

  An innovative, therapeutic, solution-based programme, engaging young African Caribbean men around wellbeing and mental health resilience, and exploring adverse childhood experiences in a safe environment that is psychologically informed, culturally sensitive, delivered and facilitated by relatable role models.

  https://firstclassnation.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Dear-Youngers-Mental-resilience-product-sheet.pdf

Advice and support

- Black Minds Matter was established in the summer of 2020 to provide free mental health counselling for Black people in response to recent traumatic events: **https://www.blackmindsmatteruk.com/**

- The Black, African and Asian Therapy Network: **https://eachother.org.uk/black-minds-matter-how-racism-affects-mental-health/**

- BBC Bitesize, Racism: How to protect your mental health: **https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/zv4bp4j**

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BRIEFING

Centre for Mental Health

Young Black men's mental health during Covid-19

Experiences from the Shifting the Dial project

Kadra Abdinasir and Shaheem Carty

Summary

The Coronavirus pandemic continues to pose a major threat to the world. But rather than acting as a great equaliser, Covid-19 has exposed and amplified existing inequalities in our society. Young Black men are one such group who have faced historic and appalling injustices. Many of the challenges they face have a devastating impact on their mental health and wellbeing.

The Shifting the Dial partnership is a collaboration involving Birmingham Repertory Theatre, Centre for Mental Health, First Class Foundation and Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust, seeking to promote the mental health of young Black

men in Birmingham. The partnership has been growing increasingly concerned about the negative impact of the crisis on young Black men's mental health.

Emerging evidence highlights the unequal effects of Covid-19 on young Black men across a range of areas in their lives:

• Research suggests that men from racialised backgrounds are reporting higher levels of mental distress during the pandemic compared to white men (Proto et al., 2021). Contributing factors include bereavement, loneliness and worries about Coronavirus and misinformation.

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