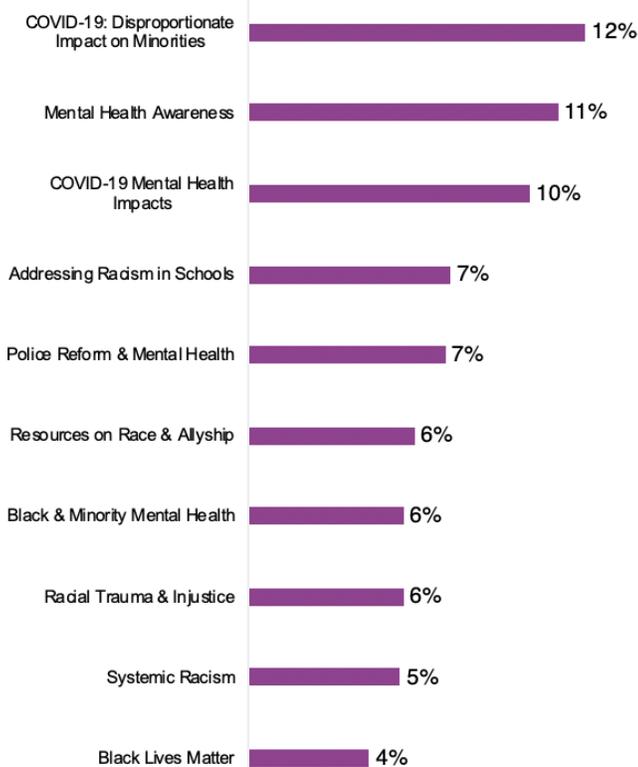


THE STATE OF PLAY

Each month, we examine how the mental health conversation in the media is evolving, focusing on youth, women, and the justice system. Last month, we took a look at healthcare worker burnout in the COVID-19 era. This month, we examine the intersection of race and mental health.

The diagram below illustrates the conversation on race and mental health, drawing upon a sample of 50,000 news articles from April to July 2020. Takeaways include:

Top 10 Themes in Media Discussion of Race & Mental Health



“Our nation’s African American community is going through an extremely painful experience, pain that has been inflicted upon this community repeatedly throughout history and is magnified by mass media and repeated deaths.”

Dan Gillison, CEO, NAMI

An unprecedented opportunity

Two forces – COVID-19 and racial tension – are fueling racial equity initiatives on mental health and social services. Across the U.S., policies are taking shape at both the state and federal level:

- In **California**, the Advancement Project put forward a plan to reach racial equity in the state budget and boost mental health services;
- **Milwaukee’s** County Board of Supervisors’ Black Caucus named investment in public and mental health as key elements of proposals to dismantle systemic racism, and;
- **Congress** is addressing gaps in access and suicide prevention as part of the next coronavirus relief package.

Schools are a focal point

New **attention** is being paid to how microaggressions and racist incidents in schools harm the mental health of young people. As the nation faces a racial reckoning, schools are taking action to combat discrimination by urging **teachers** to be proactively anti-racist; investing in **social and emotional learning**; and addressing **racist social media posts** from other students.

Treating the symptoms while curing the disease

In late May, Dan Gillison, CEO of NAMI, was one of the first mental health leaders to declare racism a **public health crisis**. As the trauma of racism becomes more visible to the public, community-specific mental health support groups like **Brother, Let’s Talk** are gaining traction while therapists urge Black people to intentionally employ **self-care techniques** to cope with the fear and anxiety fomented in today’s societal climate. Critics argue that underlying **economic and social disparities** must be addressed to truly protect the mental health of BIPOC communities.

THOUGHT STARTERS

A roundup of thought-provoking pieces on mental health for youth, women, and the justice system.



Youth Mental Health: The Cost of Staying Home

Federal policymakers, including President Trump and U.S. Secretary of Education **Betsy DeVos**, are putting the mental health of students at the center of the debate about reopening schools this fall, with support from the **American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)**. In early July, health officials and policymakers participated in a roundtable to discuss the prospect of having students physically present even as COVID-19 cases rise in the U.S. Prior to the roundtable, the AAP released guidance that stated:

“Lengthy time away from school and associated interruptions of supportive services often results in social isolation, making it difficult for schools to identify and address important learning deficits as well as child and adolescent physical or sexual abuse, depression and suicidal ideation...Policies to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 within schools must be balanced with the known harms to children, adolescents, families, and the community by keeping children at home.”



Women’s Mental Health: The Burden of Anxiety

On July 7th, the **Women’s Preventive Services Initiative (WPSI)** published an official recommendation to routinely screen women and girls 13 years and older for anxiety, even if they have no current diagnosis. The screening recommendation complements a screening already in place for **depression** by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force. **Dr. Heidi Nelson**, an author of the WPSI report, explains the importance of clinical guidelines and the invisible pervasiveness of anxiety in many women’s lives:

“Anxiety lives under the surface and can be very disabling, but it’s not easily picked up by clinicians...by asking a few questions, we have the ability to help people in a way that’s not possible unless we actually ask...It really holds women back...it’s a condition that really impairs them over a long trajectory of their lives.”



The Justice System: Providing Care Behind Bars

In cities like **Minneapolis** and **Los Angeles**, the movement for police reform is driving proposals to reallocate funds from law enforcement toward services like mental health and addiction treatment. Still, a huge amount of mental healthcare and counseling continues to be provided in jails and prisons. Earlier this year, an **article** in the American Counseling Association’s publication *Counseling Today* revealed the firsthand reality of providing care in a jail:

“Four of us share a counseling office...seeing an inmate always depends on first winning the competition to find a room. Inmates who are judged to be dangerous, who are on disciplinary status or who are on suicide watch are shackled with ankle chains and handcuffed. In one room, these inmates are then also chained to the wall. Nothing in my training prepared me for the shock of trying to carry on an intense, personal counseling session with a person in chains.”

THE PUNCHLIST



3 ways to take action on this month.

1

Quick read:

In June, the American Psychiatric Association Foundation released a succinct guide to managing students' wellbeing while distance learning. **Notice.Talk. Act™ @ School** encourages teachers, parents, and caregivers to remain vigilant of behavior that could signal emotional or psychological distress.

2

Follow:

Sleep hygiene has become a high priority for individuals interested in maintaining resiliency through the COVID-19 pandemic. Follow U.K.-based researcher Dr. Sophie Bostock, **@thesleepscientist**, on Twitter for a trove of fascinating infographics, interviews, and insights about the science of sleep.

3

Watch:

Harvard law professor Martha Minow gave a TED talk, "**How Can Restorative Justice Create a More Equitable Legal System?**" Minow argues we need to re-think the justice and law enforcement system in the U.S. in order to emphasize "accountability, apology and service," and to leverage 'tools of forgiveness' that already exist in U.S. law.

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