



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS
4340 East West Highway, Suite 402
Bethesda, MD 20814

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Phone: 301-657-0270
Fax: 301-657-0275 • TTY: 301-657-4155
Web: www.nasponline.org

Mental Health and Mental Health Care among Racial and Ethnic Minorities in the U.S.

Prepared by
Jeffrey L. Charvat, PhD
Director of Research and Information Services

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- Compared to white Americans, minorities are less likely to receive needed mental health services, receive poorer quality services when in treatment, and are underrepresented in mental health care research (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001).
- While the prevalence of mental disorders among Hispanics is similar to that for white Americans (Kessler et al., 2006), there are striking disparities in mental health care, with racial and ethnic minorities having less access to mental health services (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001).
- In the U.S., mental disorders are correlated with disadvantaged social status, including being female, unmarried, having low socioeconomic status, and being non-Hispanic black (Kessler et al., 2006).
- The President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health (2003) acknowledged that racial and ethnic minorities bear a disproportionately high burden of disability from mental disorders and recommended improving access to quality care that is culturally competent.
- Hispanic parents report lower rates of emotional or behavioral difficulties and much less use of health care services for mental health problems for their four- to 17-year-old children than non-Hispanic black or non-Hispanic white parents (Pastor, Reuben, & Falkenstern, 2006); however, the lower prevalence of reported difficulties may be related to stigma, language difficulties, and barriers to health care (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001).
- There is growing evidence that school mental health programs improve educational outcomes by decreasing absences, decreasing discipline referrals, and increasing test scores (New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, 2003).
- In 2005, 8.8 percent of 12- to 17-year-olds in the U.S. (2.2 million) experienced at least one major depressive episode in the past year; this figure was 9.1 percent for Hispanic youth (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2007).

- A recent national survey revealed the prevalence of attempted suicide to be higher among Hispanic (11.3%) than white (7.3%) and black (7.6%) students; higher among Hispanic female (14.9%) than white female (9.3%) and black female (9.8%) students; and higher among Hispanic male (7.8%) than white male (5.2%) students (Eaton et al., 2006).

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