

Should race play a part in the quality of mental health care you receive?

The call for more psychologists from non-white backgrounds.

Each year 25% of people in England will experience a mental health problem of some kind. However, while consultation regarding mental health issues has increased, treatment remains low. Reports from both England and Wales suggests 1 in 8 people receive treatment for their mental struggles.

Many factors play into how well you receive the treatment and as a result quality care. One of the factors which shape your mental health treatment experience is race. Getting help from a psychologist who understands the challenges, and sometimes grievances, of one's racial identity will allow them to better assess the patient's mental health accurately.

Of the 32.3 thousand psychologists in the UK, 9.6% identify under the category of BAME – Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (Office of National

Statistics, 2018).

One 23-year-old woman, that wished to remain anonymous, said: "With a white psychologist, they won't understand my experience or my heritage as an Indian woman. The pandemic has been increasingly hard on me, and I mentally can't handle trying to help a psychologist understand my culture whilst my mental health is at an all time low!"

Black or Black British people suffer higher levels of common mental health problems (such as anxiety and depression) but are the group unlikely to pursue treatment.

With this, the Black and minority ethnics in Psychiatry and Psychology (BiPP) Network has made deliberate efforts to highlight and campaign for the advancement of representation in the field.



They aim to push for a more culturally and racially diverse workforce, from treating people at a clinic to educating the next generations.

The effects of having a psychologist of similar background to patients.

An extensive report done by the Race Equality Foundation in 2020 found that discrimination played a part as a factor when some people decided to seek out mental health treatment.

The Black, African and Asian Therapy Network (BAATN) hosts an online directory of therapists who have experience and knowledge working with people from BAME backgrounds to offer them the best support and alleviate their mental struggles.

Sam, an administrator at BAATN said: "Our primary focus and area of expertise is to support people from these heritages. However, we are open to other People of Colour who are also affected by prejudice due to the colour of their skin."

She continued: "We actively seek partnerships with white-majority

therapy and training organisations that acknowledge racism, and the importance of undoing the impact of racism, as an essential part of being mentally healthy."

In a 2014 published research journal, David T. Goode-Cross and Karen Ann Grim, explain that black therapists most often feel a distinct sense of solidarity with their Black clients, as evidenced by having a better understanding of the context of Black clients' lives, creating easier and faster therapeutic connections with Black clients, and feeling especially

committed to these clients' well-being.

This is only further proved as Nathan, a 21-year-old, who recently started therapy for his depression, said: "Talking to someone with the same racial background was comforting as I didn't need to over-explain cultural norms. It alleviates some of my added stress caused by COVID-19. To not think about my race when at therapy, I am able to think solely about bettering my mental state."

