

2024

INVISIBLE TO VISIBLE

Focus Group Report



**WE DESERVE THE HAPPY,
HEALTHY, SATISFYING LIFE**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 01** Introduction
- 02** Priorities
- 03** Methodology
- 04** Key Findings
- 05** Black-Centred Therapy
- 06** Conclusion
- 07** Next Steps
- 08** Acknowledgment

WHO ARE WE?

Trauma can no longer be defined solely as an event; rather, it encompasses an involuntary physiological (BODY), emotional (MIND), and spiritual (SPIRIT) response to a situation or circumstance perceived by the individual as overwhelming, fearful, threatening, socially unjust, or punishing. **By age 40, most adults have experienced at least three traumatic events that continue to have significant negative impact their health and well-being.**

For the Afro-descendant community, trauma is not merely an individual experience but also a collective one. **The combined legacy of the enslavement and colonization experience has exposed the Afro-descendant population to racism, discrimination, and a myriad of other "isms" that cause great distress and elicit traumatic responses that are yet to be fully understood.** Though Canada abolished slavery in August 1834, we now understand that the pain of anti-Black racism reverberates and is genetically expressed at intergeneration trauma even centuries later.

Empowering the Afro-descendant community to achieve its full potential requires interventions that acknowledge and adequately address the individual and communal wounds created over the past 464 years. **This journey of healing and growth begins with raising awareness and dismantling the stigmas associated with seeking mental health care.**

We are a practice and educational organization with a visionary focus on spearheading an international movement. **Our aim is to encourage every individual within the global Afro-descendant community to embark on personal and communal trauma recovery journeys.** Our mission is to build an international network of Trauma Recovery Specialists capable of supporting Afro-descendant individuals and communities in attaining health and wellbeing. Between 2024 and 2030, we aim to train 1000 Afro-descendant nurses, allied health professionals, coaches, and community advocates to have a massive and positive impact on the mental health landscape in the community.

We believe the greatest form of restorative justice is healing peoples and nations deeply wounded by colonization and the enslavement experience.

PRIORITIES

Why Nationwide Focus Groups?

Our objective is to collaborate with advocates, clinicians, and Black-led organizations to develop tailored solutions that address the unique mental health needs of the Black community.



THE UNIQUE MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS OF THE BLACK COMMUNITY

The Black community faces distinct challenges related to restorative mental health. As we delve into the diverse perspectives, cultural intricacies, socioeconomic factors, and historical backgrounds within the community, it becomes increasingly clear that a nuanced understanding of these specific needs and experiences across Canada is paramount. Fully understanding these complexities can support us in developing effective programs and comprehensive strategies tailored to foster healing and well-being.



BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS TO ACCESSING NEEDED SERVICE

The stigma surrounding mental health in the Black/Afro-descendant community has prevented many from seeking help. However, other barriers also hinder access to vital mental health services. These hurdles include lack of awareness of available resources, systemic racism, and financial limitations. At the Becoming Institute, we're committed to eliminating these barriers and ensuring every member of the Black/Afro-descendant community has unhindered access to the mental health care they deserve.



COLLABORATIVE DEVELOPMENT OF HOLISTIC MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAMS

The insights gathered from nationwide focus groups will inform the development of holistic mental health programs that address the diverse needs of the Black community. This includes programs that incorporate culturally relevant approaches, promote mental wellness, and provide comprehensive support services beyond traditional therapy. By tailoring programs to the specific needs and preferences of the Black/Afro-descendant community, we can enhance their effectiveness and promote long-term mental well-being.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative & Quantitative Findings

Between March and April 2024, we conducted a comprehensive market research to delve into the unique mental health needs of the Black community. Through a combination of surveys (participants = 83) and focus groups (participants = 31), we sought to gain insights into both personal and structural barriers to accessing mental health services and more fully understand how mental health service providers could best support the Black population.

Survey Recruitment and Participation

Using social networks for recruitment, we invited 350 individuals to participate in our survey, hosted on Typeform. Of those invited, 152 began the survey, with 83 ultimately completing it. Anecdotal feedback from participants indicated concerns about the length of the survey and queries regarding the use of their information. The survey, comprised of 34 questions, maintained anonymity while gathering demographic data such as race, age, income, education, marital status, and number of dependents.

Focus Group Discussions

Additionally, we conducted two 2-hour focus groups, each comprised of 31 and 21 individuals respectively from the Black community. While the discussions were rich and insightful, the time constraints of the initial focus group prevented us from fully addressing all planned questions. As a result, a second focus group was convened to ensure thorough exploration of participants' thoughts, beliefs, desires, and values.

Overall, our project aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the mental health landscape within the Black community, laying the groundwork for targeted interventions and programs that address identified needs and barriers.

The following summarizes the key findings gleaned from our survey responses and focus group discussions, offering valuable insights for future initiatives aimed at supporting mental health and well-being in this community.

KEY FINDINGS

Initiation of Help Seeking Activities

From home to the workplace, schools, religious institutions, and social circles, the quality of our relationships profoundly affects our well-being. Current research underscores the common thread that individuals typically turn to therapy due to challenges in establishing and maintaining fulfilling interpersonal connections across various life domains (Yalom, 2017).

We asked survey participants to contemplate this question **“What chain of events led you to seek therapy?”** The response suggest that as a group, the Black/Afro-descendant community, is slowly making a decision to use therapy to end intergenerational trauma and fully engage in all aspect of Canadian life.

CHAIN OF EVENTS



Both the focus groups and the survey suggest that most individuals go through a diverse and often complex pathway to access mental health care. Some individuals experience distress but seek help only because the situation become a crisis and seeking help is the only option. Responses varied widely, with some participants citing specific life events such as relationship breakdowns or loss, while others mentioned ongoing struggles with work-related stress and mental health issues such as anxiety or depression. Recurring themes include:

- Mental and emotional stress or trauma
- Marriage/relationship challenges
- Work-related stress/issues
- Family-related issues

WHAT DOES A DEPRESSED PERSON LOOK LIKE?



DSM-IV CRITERIA FOR DEPRESSION

According to the DSM-IV, a person may be diagnosed with depression if 5 of the 9 symptoms below are present.

1. Depressed Mood
2. Markedly diminished interest or pleasure in most or all activities
3. Significant weight loss or weight gain
4. Insomnia or hypersomnia
5. Psychomotor retardation
6. Fatigue or loss of energy
7. Feelings of worthlessness or excessive or inappropriate guilt
8. Diminished ability to think or focus, or make decisions
9. Recurrent thoughts of death or suicidal ideation, plan, or attempt

“Depression has a lot of different looks. It’s hard to tell with some people, especially those who are high functioning”.

Depression is commonly linked with feelings of sadness, both emotionally and through facial expressions. However, it can manifest in various ways beyond just visible signs of sadness. These manifestations range from decreased motivation to appearing high-functioning despite internal struggles. Participants in the focus group identified depression as an “illness with different looks and symptoms”, it varies from person to person. Some of the symptoms mentioned include:

- Physical symptoms like headaches, mood changes, and changes in sleep and eating patterns
- Weight loss or weight gain
- Being physically present, but not mentally present
- Overly excited or too serious
- Numbness to society or social engagements

KEY FINDINGS

Among our focus group registrants, 53% have worked with a psychotherapist at some point in their lives. 28 of 41 participants were ≥ 30 years. Importantly, 12 of the 41 registrants are based in the USA. Other key findings are outlined below:

RESEARCH FOCUS	PRIMARY FINDINGS	SECONDARY FINDINGS
Help-seeking Barriers	32% of participants stated lack of access to high quality and affordable mental health services is the most significant access barrier.	22.9% of participants refused to access psychotherapy services because they felt they should be able to handle their own problems.
Quality Trauma recovery services	72% of participants identified empathy and compassion as key qualities they look for in practitioners & programs	69.9% of participants identified cultural sensitivity and diversity as central to partnering with therapists.
Therapist Engagement	55% of survey participants have concerns about the cost or affordability of therapy	43% of participant worry about the therapist not understanding or empathizing with them or their circumstance.
Personal Support systems	77% participants identified family and Friends as their primary source of support	38.6% of participants identified religious and spiritual communities were significant to their management of emotional issue
Aspects of your life most impacted by past traumas	33% of participants identified romantic relationships as the aspect of life most impacted by unresolved trauma.	16% of participants indicated that their self-esteem and confidence are the aspects of life most impacted by unresolved trauma.
Growth Areas	67% of participants desire teachings on coping strategies & emotional regulation techniques	66% also desired teaching or mentorship related to understanding the effects of trauma

RACISM IS TRAUMATIC

Data from The Mental Health Commission of Canada highlights that 60% of Black Canadians say they would be more likely to seek help if more equitable mental health services were available. Notably, 34.2% of Black Canadians experiencing significant distress have never sought mental health services (Taylor & Kuo, 2020).

Anti-Black racism is a systematic and structural racial prejudice directed toward Black people. It systematically marginalizes Black people and communities and devalues Blackness in all contexts. Due to the unique challenges faced by members of the Black community, Black patients may prefer seeing Black therapists as they feel that Black therapists can better understand their experiences, are culturally competent, and identify with their cultural stressors.

WHAT IS SAFE THERAPY?

In prioritizing the mental health needs of the Black community, it becomes evident that safe therapy is paramount. Safe therapy requires that we go beyond conventional approaches; it addresses historical and intergenerational traumas ingrained within our collective experiences.

Safe therapy is delivered by qualified Black therapists who not only understand but embrace our cultural and spiritual ways of knowing and being. It incorporates a powerful truth, forgiveness, and reconciliation process that foster deep healing and resilience within our community.

Safe
THERAPY

HISTORICAL
TRAUMA

- **Widespread effects**
- **Collective suffering**
- **Malicious intentions**

INTER-GENERATIONAL
TRAUMA

- **Individual Exposure**
- **Repeated on children**
- **Repeated on children's children**





The Becoming Method

The Black community can no longer ignore the varied and unique ways in which current and historical traumas impact the well-being of every individual and the community as a whole.

The Becoming Method™ is our signature program and is currently used in combination with a structured and collaborative community change approach to support individuals, couples, families, organizations, and communities with achieving health and wellbeing.

As we advocate for mental health support tailored to our unique needs, safe therapy is of the highest priority.

CONCLUSION

We recognize the importance of expanding our efforts and continuing the conversation on the unique mental health needs of the Black/Afro-Descendant Community. The findings from this initial study highlight the urgent need for interventions that holistically address the needs multiple and layered impact of historical and intergenerational trauma.



As a community, it's time for us to tackle the wounds that continue to impact individuals, families, and the community. Providing culturally competent mental health services and creating safe spaces for healing is a proactive step toward breaking the cycle of intergenerational trauma.



We advocate for the prioritization of community-driven solutions in addressing mental health disparities. By empowering communities to identify and implement solutions tailored to their unique needs, we can create a supportive environment where individuals feel empowered to seek help and access the resources they need to thrive.



As we work with Black-led, Black-focused, and Black-serving organization to conduct National focus groups we aim to open doors to collaborative discussions and engage diverse stakeholders in developing comprehensive strategies for promoting mental wellness and accessibility to services that have remained under-utilized by the Canadian Black/Afro-descendant population.

JOIN US

We invite you to partner with us by sending a mail to hello@becomingmethod.com to further contribute to our understanding of the mental health landscape within the Black and Afro-descendant Community and to explore potential avenues for intervention and support. Together, let us pave the way for a brighter and healthier future for all members of the Black Community.

NEXT STEPS



Conducting a Nationwide Focus Group

The Becoming Institute is committed to conducting nationwide focus groups across Canada. We invite Black-led, Black-focused, Black-serving organizations across Canada to join & help us understand how to best serve the diverse groups in the Afro-descendent population.



Developing Tailored Strategies and Programs

Through collaborative discussions and engagement with participants from various backgrounds, we will develop tailored strategies and programs that address the unique challenges faced by our community.



Becoming Institute Trauma Recovery Certificate Course

The Afro-descendant community has long faced structural barriers to access high quality and effective mental health care. In response the community has attempted to care for itself using the talents of untrained individuals like coaches, peer mentors, and advocates. The Becoming Institute aims to equip nurses, allied health professional and paraprofessionals with the education and skills to support the community with accessing mental health service that is holistic and sensitive to the needs of the Afro-descendant population. Additionally, we have identified the training of Black men and youth as a top priority over the next 5 years. By empowering individuals with the necessary knowledge and skills, we can foster a supportive environment where everyone has access to quality mental health care.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We want to extend a heartfelt thank you to all the incredible organizations and individuals whose support and participation made the focus group report possible. Your dedication to mental health advocacy within the Black community is invaluable and has laid the foundation for meaningful progress in mental health advocacy within the Black community.

A special note of appreciation goes out to each participant who generously shared their experiences and insights during the focus group sessions. Your voices are the driving force behind our efforts, and your courage in speaking out is truly inspiring. Your contributions have not only enriched our understanding but have also set the stage for future initiatives aimed at addressing mental health challenges within our community.

Together, we are paving the way for holistic healing, transformative change, and future where mental health support is accessible and inclusive for all members of the Afro-descendant community.



As we reflect on the impact of our focus group, let us remember that this is just the beginning. The combined study serves as a stepping stone for the important work that lies ahead.

We invite all members of the Black Community to partner with us in our mission to advance mental health advocacy and support within our community. Your perspectives, experiences, and insights are invaluable as we work towards creating a healthy environment for us all.

LET'S CONNECT



We are here to help

in all the ways you need.



If you would like more information about our trauma recovery services, please click on the link below to schedule a free 30-minute consultation.



Call us 24 hours at 236-852-2299



E-mail us at hello@becomingmethod.com



<https://becomingmethod.com>



COLLABORATE
WITH US

Please use [this link](#) to schedule a time to discuss how your organization can partner with us.