IMPROVING AFRICAN-AMERICAN RETENTION IN SUBSTANCE ABUSE TREATMENT

A series of educational products, guidance, and technical assistance for mental health providers, substance abuse treatment providers and primary care physicians who seek to elevate cultural competence efforts to include an understanding of the presence and impact of implicit racial bias in health care and substance abuse treatment.

TOPICS:

- Scope of the Problem
- What it Means to be African-American
- Implicit Bias and Microaggression
- Evidence-Based Strategies

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WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE AFRICAN-AMERICAN?

For Substance Abuse Providers

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HISTORY OF THE TERM AFRICAN-AMERICAN

Many terms have been used throughout history to describe the descendants of African people who were captured, shipped as cargo and sold throughout the Americas and the Caribbean, as part of the transatlantic slave trade. Slavery continued in the United States until 1865.

The term Colored was adopted by emancipated slaves as a term of racial pride, but by the early 1900s was replaced by the term Negro. The Civil Rights and Black Power movements in the 1960s brought the term Black. The term African-American was popularized in the 1980s as a less-militant, less-revolutionary alternative to the term Black. The 2000s brought the terms Minority and Persons of Color which more widely refer to any individual who is not white.

DIVERSITY AMONG AFRICAN-AMERICANS

African-Americans are a diverse group with varying experiences based on race, age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, marital status, education level, profession, immigration status and more. Substance abuse providers must be careful to appreciate and celebrate intra-race diversity.

EFFECT OF THE TERM AFRICAN-AMERICAN ON REFERRAL AND RETENTION

Substance abuse treatment programs place special emphasis and focus on helping participants redefine themselves from addiction identities to recovery identities. Indeed, the higher number of valued identities an individual has, the more likely that person is to attain and maintain abstinence.

SELF-EFFICACY  Belief in one’s ability to succeed

In the United States, race and ethnicity are often key definers of identity. The transatlantic slave trade stole the identities of Africans who were brought to the Americas as slaves. Individuals seeking substance abuse treatment, who are descendants of enslaved Africans, often feel the loss of those stolen identities and can articulate the impact it continues to have on their lives.

For this reason, it is critically important that substance abuse providers avoid the common mistakes of choosing which term identifies a person of color or believing that said term adequately encompasses the nuance and complexity of that individual. When we define others with our preferred term, we may unintentionally invalidate their self-efficacy by undermining their right to define themselves with their preferred term based on their life experiences and values.

Research suggests that improving emotional self-efficacy can increase retention and treatment outcomes for emotionally vulnerable patients.