

Deeply Rooted: Maximizing the Strengths of a Historically Black University and Community-based Participatory Research to Understand Environmental Stressors and Trauma among Black Youth

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Highlights

- This research uses CBPR and a developmental lens to understand stressors and trauma among Black youth.
- The recruitment and engagement of a youth advisory, community advisory, and university are described.
- Themes from discussion groups with the advisory boards are presented.
- The unique advantages of an HBCU and CBPR to address mental health disparities are highlighted.

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Abstract This paper explores a partnership between an HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) and a community to understand trauma given the high rates of reported violence among youth locally. The accumulative stress of living in high-stress, high-poverty environments coupled with the normative developmental tasks of adolescence is thought to place these youths at risk for negative mental and physical outcomes (Murry et al., 2011). The current research uses a community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach and developmental lens to better understand environmental stressors and subsequent trauma among Black youth. Specifically, the paper describes the recruitment, engagement, and equitable partnership between a youth advisory board (YAB), university research team, and community agencies advisory board (CAB). The current work is part of a larger research study designed to explore environmental stressors, coping, and social supports for Black youth residing in low-resource urban communities. The broad objective of the research is to develop a trauma-informed community intervention to improve adolescent mental health. The initial phase of this university–community research, which entails the YAB,

CAB, and university discussion groups, is outlined in this paper. Community engagement and trust are key factors described in the literature when collaborating with communities of color. These themes were reiterated by research partners in this study. The research team created coding terms to identify themes from YAB and CAB transcript data, respectively. YAB themes regarding stressors centered around financial strain, anger, and loss/violence. CAB themes regarding adolescent mental health and resources centered around trauma, trust, and sustainability. Initial steps to utilize the themes identified thus far are described. The unique advantages of a HBCU and CBPR to address mental health disparities in ethnic minority communities are also highlighted.

Keywords Black/African American youth · Historically Black College and Universities · Community-based Participatory Research · Trauma

Introduction

Rooted in the quest for equality, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) are uniquely positioned to engage in research and service that addresses health disparities. Nested within the mission of these institutions is the goal of promoting health equity with an invested interest in serving the needs of the underserved, the marginalized, and the oppressed. Research conducted by HBCUs often seeks to level the playing field through human and intellectual capacities that advance social

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justice (Freemark, 2015). Howard University is a premiere HBCU nestled in the nation's capital of Washington, D.C. It is often referred to as the “Mecca,” which represents its grandeur and prestige as one of the largest HBCUs with a long history of illustrious and influential alumni. This reference not only refers to the scholarly contributions that have come from the institution but also the social community that it facilitates; not only on its campus but also the history and influence it holds within the surrounding Black community. The university owns one of the oldest hospitals in Washington, D.C., it serves many Black Americans, particularly the underserved and poor Black residents of the city. As a leader in addressing health disparities, Howard University has long engaged community to tackle pressing public health concerns plaguing the Black community. Of particular interest to this endeavor is the *Network Project*, which is a burgeoning community participatory partnership between Howard University, Black youth (ages 13 – 17), and social agents that serve this population to address community violence and trauma.

Black youth residing in low-income, urban communities are exposed to contextual risk factors that render them susceptible to trauma and loss over the course of their lifetime (Alegría et al., 2013; Dill & Ozer, 2016; Johnson, 2010; Smith & Patton, 2016). In particular, they are disproportionately exposed to numerous severe, chronic, and uncontrollable stressors (e.g., Allison et al., 1999; Attar et al., 1994; Kliewer et al., 2006). For example, poverty brings a range of economic stressors (e.g., evictions, substandard housing, and disruptions to important services) and dramatically increases risk for family discord, separation, abuse, and neglect (Conger, Ge, Elder, Lorenz, & Simons, 1994; Evans & English, 2002). *Urban* poverty increases exposure to violence in the community (Kliewer et al., 2006; Morales & Guerra, 2006; Youngstrom, Weist, & Albus, 2003).

In 2019, Washington, D.C. experienced the highest homicide rates it has seen in a decade with 166 murders (Metropolitan Police Department Statistics and Data). Consistent with data identifying homicide as the leading cause of death for Black youth ages 10–24 (Center for Disease Control, 2016), one of the most pervasive stressors and predominant traumatic events facing youth residing in low-income, urban communities is neighborhood violence (Smith, 2015). The impact of community violence on youth development has been well documented (Harden, Kenemore, Mann Edwards, List, & Martinson, 2015; Jenkins & Bell, 1994; Sampson et al., 1997; Santiago & Galster, 2014; Voisin et al., 2011). Additionally, recent research indicates that youth's increased exposure to neighborhood violence, in particular, is directly related to increased risk of multiple negative mental and physical health outcomes (Jackson, Posick, & Vaughn, 2019).

More specifically, violence exposure has been associated with increased risk of aggression, depression, traumatic stress, risky behaviors (e.g., alcohol abuse and sexual risk taking), chronic disease (e.g., coronary health disease and diabetes), delinquency, and premature mortality (Fagan & Novak, 2018; Gilbert et al., 2015).

To increase our understanding of trauma and improve outcomes for youth exposed to violence, more recent approaches have emphasized building on community strengths. Specifically, the voices of historically marginalized groups like Black youth have traditionally been excluded when developing interventions to focus on their needs. Trauma-informed practices have been developed in response to research associated with understanding the impact of exposure to violence (Amaya-Jackson & DeRosa, 2007; Kliewer et al., 2004). Evidenced-based treatments and interventions are often considered the “gold standard” when addressing youth trauma; however, many of these programs emphasize trained clinicians with survivors of violence (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2020). However, community participation in the development, implementation, and evaluation of trauma-informed programs is essential to the sustainability of efforts to prevent violence and ameliorate its lasting effect (Hausman et al., 2005). One such approach is community-based participatory research (CBPR), which has been shown to improve cultural sensitivity in research and highlights “local knowledge” that is critical to enhance the understanding of urban health problems (Minkler, 2005). CBPR complements and, in many ways, mirrors the mission and goals of HBCUs to fulfill the quest of addressing health disparities through public scholarship; thus, a synergy exists between CBPR and HBCUs. However, the extant literature does not often explore this relationship in addressing health disparities. More germane to this paper, is the university–community partnership between Howard University and a local community to address a growing need for mental health services for youth exposed to trauma and violence.

The accumulative stress of living in high-stress, high-poverty environments coupled with the normative developmental tasks of adolescence is thought to place youths at risk for negative mental and physical health outcomes (Murry et al., 2011). This paper explores a partnership between an HBCU and local communities to better understand trauma associated with the high rates of reported violence among youth. The current research uses a CBPR approach and developmental lens to address trauma and coping. Specifically, the paper outlines initial stages of recruitment, engagement, and equitable partnership between a youth advisory board, university research team, and adult community advisory board in developing a trauma-informed community intervention.

Chronic Stress, Community Violence, and Adolescent Mental Health

Urban environments present with a number of conditions that may interfere with development and increased risk for mental health problems. For example, low-income class and social class are well-known determinants of poor health and behavioral concerns. In the United States, 32% of Black children and adolescents and 26% of Latinx children and adolescents are living in poverty, which is more than double the 11% poverty rate for non-Latinx, White, and Asian children and adolescents (Kids Count Data Center & Children in Poverty, 2018). In addition to economic stressors including evictions, inadequate health care, ineffective schools, and disruptions of important services (Landis et al., 2007), African Americans living below the poverty line, are twice as likely to report psychological distress (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019).

A well-studied pathway that underlies poverty and development is elevated chronic stress (Evans & Kim, 2013). Beyond the effects of poverty in general, urban poverty is associated with heightened exposure to community violence (Smith & Patton, 2016). Previous research has established a strong association between youth exposure to violence and the endorsement of posttraumatic stress symptoms (Alegría et al., 2013; Breslau, Wilcox, Storr, Lucia, & Anthony, 2013; Paxton et al., 2004; Roberts, Gilman, Breslau, Breslau, & Koenen, 2011; Smith & Patton, 2016). In studies of urban youth, high rates of trauma exposure, including direct and indirect witnessing of community violence and domestic violence exposure, are shown to produce trauma symptoms indicative of posttraumatic stress (Lieberman & Knorr, 2007; Margolin & Gordis, 2000; Post et al., 2014). The effects of trauma experiences may be pervasive even when exposure does not meet established diagnostic criteria (Harden et al., 2015; Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration, 2014).

Considerations with Black Communities and HBCUs in Conducting CBPR to Address Mental Health

Given the aim of this research to utilize CBPR to engage a local community and university to address the mental health needs of Black youth impacted by environmental stressors such as violence and subsequent trauma, it is important to note lessons learned from the body of research that utilizes CBPR with communities of color to address health disparities (Freeman, Brugge, Bennett-Bradley, Levy, & Carrasco 2006; Israel, Eng, Shulz, & Parker 2005; Israel, Eng, Shulz, & Parker 2012).

When considering key components for effective community engagement to address violence and trauma, most youth violence prevention initiatives offer both challenges and opportunities for community engagement (Morrell-Samuels, Bacallao, Brown, Bower, & Zimmerman 2016). Over the past two decades, there has been increasing interest in the potential of forming community partnerships to address complex public health issues such as youth violence and trauma. Several researchers have proposed guidelines and principles to facilitate the establishment and maintenance of effective partnerships when addressing youth violence (Baker, Homan, Schonhoff, & Kreuter, 1999; Buys & Bursnall, 2007; Green, Daniel, & Novick, 2001; Plowfield, Wheeler, & Raymond, 2005). Across the literature, there appear to be several common themes that emerged: trust, transparency, communication, and commitment as critical values underlying successful partnerships (Baker et al., 1999; Green et al., 2001; Morrel-Samuels et al., 2016; Plowfield et al., 2005). Trust entails investing time to build relationships and operating under the basic assumption that all parties are working in good faith to address the chosen problem (Morrel-Samuels et al., 2016; Plowfield et al., 2005). Trust is enhanced by transparency. It entails clear and honest communication about the extent and nature of community involvement of each party (Baker et al., 1999; Morrel-Samuels et al., 2016). Transparency also includes agreement on roles, norms, and collaborative development of mutual goals and outcomes (Green et al., 2001). Commitment and communication are viewed as key in achieving sustainability. They entail incorporating identified strengths and community assets; identifying talented leaders from the community; and establishing strong relationships with local institutions (Green et al., 2001; Plowfield et al., 2005).

Addressing health disparities requires that those impacted and living the experience are involved in developing the research not only participating in the research (Dancy, Wilbur, Talashek, Bonner, & Barnes-Boyd, 2004). Engaging and enlisting the existing strengths and talents of a community to address problems associated with health and health outcomes relevant to the community allows for research that is contextually relevant and increases opportunities for sustainability (Ferré, Jones, Norris, & Rowley, 2010).

When communities of color, particularly Black communities, engage in research there is a shadow of skepticism or historical distrust of institutions (Corbie-Smith, et al., 2007). Empirical evidence reveals that trust is a necessary component for Black Americans in the decision to participate in scientific investigation (Topp, Newman, & Jones, 2008). Many HBCUs are located in Black communities thus, giving them a distinct advantage to understand cultural norms, issues related to data collection, and to address health disparities through engagement and

research. Hence, the current research seeks to highlight an HBCU and its unique position to engage a local Black community in CBPR to address the disparity of trauma-informed interventions.

There is an abundance of literature that utilizes CBPR to address health disparities; however, fewer focus on HBCUs in the university–community partnership (Littlefield, Edwards, & Akers, 2014; Livingston, Porter, Bell-Hughes, & Brandon, 2018; Lowe, 2008). Of those that included such partnerships, few if any, used CBPR to address environmental stressors such as exposure to violence to engage in a trauma-informed adolescent mental health community intervention.

The Current Study

Understanding environmental and social determinants of health disparities related to violence and trauma among Black youth is imperative to addressing the needs of this population. The current research is part of a larger study, *The Network Project*, which has the broad objective to better understand environmental stressors, coping, and social supports for Black youth to design a contextually relevant program that addresses trauma. There are several study aims; however, this paper focuses on the establishment of a youth advisory board and a community services advisory board that serve as cultural and contextual gatekeepers to identify essential aspects of community interventions to address the issues most salient for the youth. The establishment of advisory boards provides a more in-depth understanding of the cultural and contextual factors that impact the mental health of the study population. Additionally, it is believed that advisory boards enhance participant involvement through cultural and contextual familiarity.

The *Network Project* is a CBPR partnership bringing together researchers, practitioners, and key stakeholders to increase knowledge and cultural competence regarding the social determinants of health disparities on Black youth and mental health. The current work presents themes identified by the youth and community advisory boards regarding environmental stressors and trauma of Black youth residing in low-income urban neighborhoods.

Methods

Collaborations and Participant Recruitment

The first author received requests from local public charter schools to provide trauma-informed teacher in-service trainings which led to individual meetings with local principals, teachers, parents, and youth-serving agencies

within economically disadvantaged and high-crime areas in the city. Following these meetings, the aims of the *Network Project* were drafted and later solidified once advisory boards were formed. Prior to obtaining approval from Howard University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), three local public charter high schools agreed to partner with the research team from which members of the youth advisory board were identified. One of the three partner schools experienced administrative changes during the establishment of the youth advisory board which halted collaboration; thus, only two of the partner schools actively engaged in formation of the advisory boards.

In accordance with CBPR principles, a youth advisory board (YAB) and a community advisory board (CAB) were recruited to provide insight to research design, engagement, recruitment, and implementation. The research team used a purposive sampling approach to establish advisory board members.

YAB members were recruited by teacher recommendation and/or student volunteer. Each school had an identified liaison who helped facilitate the school partnership. For one school a School Counselor served as the research liaison, while an Intervention Specialist served as the point of contact for the other school. Each school liaison emailed teachers and/or announced during teacher meetings names or suggestions of students for the YAB whereby students would be asked to provide their opinions and ideas on stressors, violence, coping, and social support. Teachers were told that any student was eligible for recommendation. Approximately, two teachers recommended students for the YAB in one school, while four teachers recommended students from the other school. Upon receiving recommendations, the school liaison informed each student that they were recommended by a teacher and asked if a member of the research team could provide them with more information. Students were offered an informational call and/or meeting to provide goals, expectations, and logistical details regarding the YAB. Parents were provided informational materials and were welcomed to join the informational session and/or call. Beyond being recommended by school administrators, in order to be eligible to serve a student completed the following: (a) an information session, (b) parental informed consent, (c) student assent, and (d) agree to attend bimonthly meetings. Of the 10 students recommended (four from one school and six from the other), only seven completed all required documents (consents) for participation. By consenting to serve on the YAB students agreed to participate in five team/cohesion building meetings and five special topic discussion groups. The discussion groups were planned for once a month, alternating between team building and discussion groups over the course of an academic year. YAB members received a

\$10 gift card for each discussion group attended. Due to school scheduling conflicts, standardized testing, and student availability, only three of five discussion sessions have been completed to date.

Convenient and snowball sampling was utilized to establish a CAB. Educators, parents, and representatives from youth-serving organizations were recruited to join the CAB through word of mouth and/or community advertisement. To become a member of the CAB, one must either live or work in Washington, D.C. be a parent, educator, mentor, or adult who works with youth that resides in a low-income community in Washington, D.C.; have an invested interest in youth; and willing to serve for one calendar year. The first author initially approached educators from Washington, D.C. who had previously participated in an international teacher exchange and project-based learning collaborative that the author served as a consultant and maintained contact. The first author and a graduate student research team member emailed and/or called middle and high school educators from the group (teachers and principals) to introduce the CAB, invite them to an informational session, and request names of a colleague, organization, or community member that may be interested in the CAB. Five teachers and five principals were approached and/or invited to attend an informational session. Of the 10 contacted through convenient sampling, five agreed to attend the informational session and provided the name of at least one person who works with youth who reside in low-income Washington, D.C. for the research team to recruit. Of the five names provided one agreed to attend the informational session. The research team engaged in cold calls and word of mouth to recruit CAB members. Seven members evolved and were asked to commit to one year of service, participate in bimonthly meetings, and share their personal observations and professional knowledge regarding mental health coping resources available in the communities they reside or serve. Members were also asked to provide guidance in effective ways to incorporate YAB themes into a feasible and contextually relevant trauma-informed coping resource.

Data Collection Procedures

Youth Advisory Board

Upon obtaining parental consent and student assent, seven YAB members attended an orientation which was designed to facilitate cohesion and establish ground rules for group discussions and expectations. The orientation meeting was held at Howard University which was considered a neutral setting. It is important to note that all students in Washington, DC are provided with metro cards; thus, public transportation is free for all students.

Thus, getting to the campus of the university did not pose a financial burden for the members. The YAB meetings rotated between the two participating schools and Howard University. As stated earlier, to date, the YAB has completed two of five discussion groups. The purpose of the group discussions was to provide a space where community members' voices, experiences, and knowledge could enter the research process. Additionally, each group discussion centers around a topic to capture the larger study aims, provide context to study findings, and advise researchers in how to implement findings into future intervention development. Due to late IRB approval in the academic year, a surge in violence in surrounding neighborhoods, and the impending threat of the permanent closing of two of the three charter schools at the end of academic year; these issues hindered scheduling and YAB participation resulting in only two of five groups conducted thus far.

Snacks were provided at each meeting followed by an icebreaker then engagement in cohesion building activities or discussion group topic based on the rotation of the meeting (alternating each month between cohesion/social and research topic). Each session was facilitated by two trained graduate-level research team members. Additionally, a graduate-level trained observer was present to take field notes and record group dynamics during the discussion. All group discussions were audio recorded to ensure accuracy of content. Semi-structured questions were utilized to evoke dialogue focused on stressors and coping. YAB questions for the first two discussion groups are presented below:

Session 1 (Orientation/Welcome).

- What influenced you to participate as a YAB member?
- What expectations do you have of the YAB?
- How can we (*Network Project*) make this experience interesting and helpful to you?

Session 2 (Identifying stressors).

- What is stress? What causes you the most stress?
- Are you familiar with the term stressors? What are common stressors for you and/or young people your age?

Groups also generated written information that was collected, including brainstorming possible solutions on large-scale post-it notes to share with the larger forum and research team.

Community Advisory Board

The seven CAB members consisted of four teachers, one principal, one parent, and one Executive Director of a

non-profit community organization. Meetings were held at Howard University per the request of CAB members. Bimonthly (every 2 months) meetings were facilitated by a trained graduate-level research team member while the first author served as a co-facilitator. A graduate-level trained observer was present to take field notes and record group dynamics during each discussion. Semi-structured questions were utilized to evoke dialogue yet allowed for open and organic discussion. The CAB questions for the first two group discussion sessions are presented below:

Session 1 (Orientation/Welcome).

- What is your role (parent, educator, community organizer) and how long have you worked/mentored/parent youth?
- What are your expectations for this CAB experience?
- What do you hope to contribute to the group?

Session 2 (Mental health services).

- What are the most common mental health issues among the youth you know/serve?
- What mental health services are available for youth in your community?
- What solutions would you advise to address barriers to mental health for youth in D.C.?

The meetings were facilitated like a conversation rather than a rigid or structured group. All group discussions were audio recorded to ensure accuracy of content.

To date, the CAB completed two meetings which centered around mental health services for youth in Washington, D.C. All group discussions were audio recorded to ensure accuracy of content. As the meetings were held at the end of a long workday for the CAB members, a meal was provided at each meeting. Additionally, CAB members were compensated for their time with a \$10 gift certificate for each meeting attended. Similar to the YAB, meetings began late in the academic year thus resulting in limited availability and time as most of the CAB members were educators and inundated with standardized testing and end of year requirements.

Data Analysis

De-identified group recordings were transcribed verbatim by a professional transcription service. Similar to grounded theory, a priori hypotheses were not generated at the start of the study (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The transcripts were read in their entirety by two research members who using a content

analysis approach manually coded the transcripts to identify themes. When differences were identified in coding, the research team members discussed the discrepancy and resolved such discrepancies by consensus. The first author and a qualitative data consultant debriefed with the research team members to review and discuss the codes and identified themes. The themes were created by assigning concepts to highlighted key words and phrases. Similar concepts were categorized into themes and named. Independent interpretations were discussed, and the raters jointly decided upon a final coding scheme of relevant themes. As only two sessions for each advisory board has been conducted, the second session for each group was used for analysis as the first sessions were primarily orientation and introductory in nature.

Findings

A total of four groups were conducted (YAB = 2, CAB = 2). Seven students (all female) participated in the YAB groups and seven adults (5 females, 2 males) participated in the CAB groups. Three emergent themes evolved from the YAB in response to the topic of stressors: financial strain, anger, and loss due to violence. In addition, two themes emerged from the CAB discussions: trauma and trust/sustainability.

Youth Advisory Board Themes

Financial Strain

Youth advisory board members were asked to identify a pressing stressor that they face within their communities. The most common stressor described was financial hardship or strain (7 out of 7). The concerns reflected insecurity in getting basic needs met such as inconsistent housing (e.g., frequent moves; 4 out of 7) or frequent family concerns regarding paying bills. Additionally, several students (6 out of 7) referred to violence in their community and related to lack of resources. One respondent stated, "... Nothing to do here...just trouble. You don't see all of that in other neighborhoods."

Anger

A theme that evolved related to stressors was anger. Many YAB members were able to more easily identify the emotion in response to stressors rather than identify specific stressors. Many repeatedly used the term, "feel some kind of way," (5 out of 7) coupled with references that appeared to sound like ambivalence (e.g., "It's not going to change anything anyway") yet

emerged as anger. As one member stated, “I didn’t know how to express my stress without being like violent or like always arguing.” Another stated, “I just get so mad sometimes. . .ugh. This stuff [stress]. . .ugh. It be making me so mad and sometimes I don’t even know why.” Their experiences hint to the need for coping resources which organically evolved during the orientation session.

Loss/Violence

All the YAB members described the presence of violence and/or loss due to violence (7 out of 7) as a source of stress. One member summed up the collective experience, “I don’t always feel safe here.” Another asserted, “It’s crazy. Someone is killed almost every day.” Although most recognize violence in their neighborhood (6 out of 7), some identified it as “part of life” and appeared to normalize their experience. One stated, “It is what it is. Shootings happen.”

Community Advisory Board Themes

Trauma

The CAB collectively agreed that “trauma events become a community event.” When asked to elaborate, one member stated, “. . .it does not just affect the individual or family but also the community.” Another agreed and stated, “Services that address trauma are not adequate. They are either not long enough, not comprehensive enough, and the delivery is not relevant.” A parent reiterated the presence of violence and connected this issue to trust. The member stated, “These kids witness a lot of violence. Many are not future focused. They have a fatalistic view regarding their life as it relates to the violence they have seen. With those kids, you have to build connection. They have to know that you are authentic. You have to shift from distant to connection. They have to legit believe you are there for them. . .it comes down to trust and you have to earn that.” This led to the linkage of capacity building or increasing awareness of community members regarding trauma and mental health.

Trust and Sustainability

While the CAB meeting centered around mental health services for youth, many responses reflected the need for engagement and sustainability of programs. Particular attention was given to components needed if an intervention or resources were to be introduced to community members. All CAB members agreed that community trust is imperative for any program or partnership to

be successful. Another CAB member who is a teacher reiterated this theme of trust by explaining trust and engagement:

Some of the students are in survival mode. They will try to finesse you because it is about survival. They try to get what they can because they are not sure when the opportunity will present itself again. Fundamentally, that is a trust issue. Can I trust that my needs will be met?”

For many communities of color, they have seen many with good intentions enter their communities with an intervention, but the program ends, or the resources are no longer available. This observation led to the theme of sustainability.

Community capacity building and sustainability are key components of CBPR. Because many of the CAB members focused on sustainability, the linkages between capacity building and sustainability emerged. The educators in the group quickly identified themselves as logical gatekeepers for trust and sustainability. The members unanimously agreed that “any resources or intervention has to be culturally and contextually relevant.” More specifically stated:

Training teachers is a way to sustain an intervention but you have to sell it as something they [teachers] want to advance their training/career. Teachers are always learning. To engage teachers, you have to engage administrators of the school. Everyone has to buy-in and walk the walk.

In order to sustain any intervention or collaborative relationship between the community and the university, it became clear that buy-in and trust will need to be key components.

Utilization of Findings: Informing the Development of the Intervention

The initial discussion groups allowed for youth and adult community members’ perceptions of important factors to consider regarding the development of a trauma-informed, community-supported youth intervention to address violence. The responses from the community partners will guide the research to identify possible effective community interventions. This initial phase of the study provides insight as to how partnering with community members in the research process as advisors and participants help to contextualize themes and directs the research in a deeper and meaningful way.

The themes of violence/loss and trauma from the youth and adults, respectively, acknowledge the psychological

toll of community violence and provides a general consensus that many youth from the community hold a fatalistic and/or ambivalent future orientation. Thus, trauma must be included in any discussion regarding intervention and/or prevention with the population of study. Acknowledging the magnitude of loss which perpetuates feelings of uncertainty and unpredictability appears to reinforce the fatalistic and ambivalence regarding youths' futures. Thus, it was suggested that any intervention development must include a safe space for youth to process loss and threats to one's future. Additionally, future planning or goal setting would be helpful to shift youths' thought processes to consider life beyond their current circumstances.

The themes of financial strain and anger that evolved from the YAB give rise to the cognitive and emotional demands of stressors for this population. The CAB appeared to reiterate these demands as themes of trust and sustainability evolved for them. Thus, the youths' persistent thoughts and concerns of financial strain relate to the CAB's theme of trust such that youths' uncertainty that their basic needs will be met serves as a barrier to trust that others will meet their needs. Additionally, the emotional toll of anger also appears to make it difficult to establish trust with others or with programs or resources that seek to help. Thus, a vicious cycle erupts when it comes to interventions such that anger, unmet needs, and lack of trust make it difficult to achieve sustainability (Maio et al., 2011; Plowfield et al., 2005).

The overlap and intuitive connection between themes indicate that community-level interventions for this population will need to incorporate psychoeducation around thoughts and emotions, provide a safe space to process loss and trauma, and be delivered by trusted members of the youths' community.

Discussion

Black youth are disproportionately represented in communities plagued by violence and environmental stressors; thus, leading to adverse mental health outcomes such as trauma, aggression, and poverty. This study examines stressors and mental health of Black youth from the perspective of youth and adults within an urban context. More specifically, the tenets of CBPR are used to solicit the views and recommendations of members of a YAB and a CAB, related to the emergent themes of *financial strain, anger, violence-related loss, trauma, trust, and sustainability*.

The themes align with previous research that sought to identify key elements for community-based violence prevention and trauma-informed programs. The CAB themes of trust and sustainability are similar to recommendations provided in the field for establishing and maintaining

effective partnerships for community engagement in youth violence prevention outlined in Morrel-Samuels et al. (2016). Specifically, CAB members linked trust and sustainability in such a way that suggested without gaining trust through consistency then sustainability is impossible. As one member asserted, the fundamental necessity of trust leads many Black youth residing in low-resource and underserved communities to question the reliability and intention of programs that seek to render strategies and/or solutions. While this may be viewed as skepticism by some, it is merely a survival tool which previous research (Baker et al, 1999; Green et al, 2001; Plowfield et al, 2005), indirectly acknowledges through such recommendations as transparency, trust, and commitment.

Given that many of the targeted youth often experience loss, YAB and CAB members reiterated sustainability, particularly as it relates to communities that often experience well-intended programs and interventions come and go. Thus, length and durability of any future programming proved to be imperative for both groups; specifically, the ability to sustain beyond the research period. Maio et al (2011) emphasized capacity building while Morrel-Samuels et al. (2016) highlighted commitment as essential to violence prevention and/or trauma-informed programs. Each recommendation provides support to the theme of sustainability highlighted by the CAB.

Current discussions with the YAB, CAB, and university researchers primarily center around identifying stressors and barriers to mental health services following a community traumatic event. The discussions allow for co-learning and equitable partnerships to form among the team to increase mutual knowledge on trauma, existing evidence-based interventions, community norms, and attitudes. As themes evolve among university and community partners, an iterative process allows for new concepts to be incorporated into current discussions around potential intervention content, delivery, and duration.

To date, recommendations from CAB members have centered around engaging youth, specifically with the goal of earning community trust. Additionally, community members adamantly expressed the need for sustainability at the forefront, as many of their youth have experienced violence-related loss, compounding the stressors of pre-existing financial strain. Thus, any intervention program will need to have the capacity to sustain itself in order for youth to trust that their needs can and will be met as they try to cope with the often-debilitating effects of traumatic events.

Challenges to Building and Sustaining Community Collaborations

Although our study highlights the need for community collaborations in trying to assess and address the

multitude of factors impacting youth in low-resource, urban communities, it is important to understand some of the challenges inherent in building and sustaining these collaborations. Engaging community members and partnering with underserved communities requires paradigms like CBPR (Dobransky-Fasiska et al., 2009; Greiner et al., 2014; McCann, 2010; Meade, Menard, Luque, Martinez-Tyson, & Gwede, 2011). These paradigms create the space and opportunity to address health disparities in marginalized communities that allow the work to be held by the community, strengthened by the community, and paves the way for sustainable change.

One of the most commonly noted barriers in community-academic collaborations is healthy skepticism from community organizations and racial/ethnic minority research participants of university faculty, especially if previous experiences have pathologized or patronized them (Benoit, Jansson, Millar, & Phillip, 2005). While there is no simple solution to this issue, persistent efforts and participation in community events and cultural programs are recommended when working toward establishing a relationship of trust (LeGris et al., 2000).

The history of HBCUs in traditionally underserved communities can serve as a catalyst to engage members of marginalized communities in discussions about and/or action plans to address the factors that contribute to disproportionate numbers of Black Americans impacted by poor mental health outcomes. Creative and innovative methods of conducting research (e.g., CBPR) and developing health-enhancing interventions that are effective and culturally relevant will be imperative in engaging, establishing trust, and building sustainable programs for Black youth.

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