

Four Misconceptions About Mental Health in BIPOC Communities

BIPOC Mental Health Month is focused on raising awareness about the unique challenges and mental health disparities that may affect Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) not just in July, but all year long. Despite growing recognition of mental health issues across the country, some in the BIPOC community continue to grapple with misconceptions that can sometimes lead to stigma and inadequate support. Addressing these misconceptions can help to ensure that all communities have access to the care and support they need.

In this Q&A, Magellan's Mary Hinson, Ph.D. LCMHCS, a counselor with the Military and Family Life Counselor program, shares four misconceptions about mental health in the BIPOC community.

Q: Why is BIPOC Mental Health Awareness Month important?

Dr. Mary Hinson: There are several reasons this month is a BIG deal! But here are a few... First, by talking about mental health, it makes it less of a taboo. This month also spotlights mental health challenges specific to BIPOC communities. Which in turn allows for advocacy for culturally sensitive care and draws attention to unequal access to mental health services.

Q: What are some misconceptions about mental health in BIPOC communities that need to be addressed?

Dr. Hinson:

- Thinking mental health issues mean you're weak in some way (this stems from societal stigma and misconceptions

about the nature of mental illness.)

- Assuming therapy's only for people who are "touched" (ignores the wide range of benefits therapy can offer to people dealing with everyday stresses and life challenges.)
- Believing you should keep mental health problems hush-hush in the family (reflects cultural attitudes that prioritize privacy and fear of social judgment over seeking necessary help).
- Thinking old-school healing and modern mental health care are incompatible.

Q: How can individuals raise awareness about BIPOC Mental Health Awareness Month within their own circles?

Dr. Hinson:

- Post about BIPOC Mental Health Awareness Month on your socials (most people have one, so hit share)
- If you work virtually, you could use a virtual background highlighting this month
- Check out resources to you are prepared to share resources (i.e. the Loveland Foundation, Boris L. Henson Foundation, Black Emotional and Mental Health Collective)
- Start conversations about mental health with your circles.

What role can schools and workplaces play in supporting BIPOC mental health?

- Connect people with mental health resources.
- Train staff on how to be more inclusive.
- Create relaxed spaces where people of various backgrounds can talk about mental health.
- Enacting policies that combat discrimination and promote overall wellness.
- Recognize that all do not accept the term BIPOC either.

Lumping all these groups together may suggest that everyone is having the same experience, which is inaccurate. Instead, we can consider referring specifically to the group we refer to.