

Exploring Barriers between Youth and Trauma Resulting from Racial Disparities

2022



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Report prepared for: The National Association of County and
City Health Officials

Project Summary

Healing Youth Alliance (HYA) wants to help the youth and community members in Baltimore City to be more aware of their mental health. After completion of reading the report, readers should take away the following:

- Everyone deserves a seat at the table
- Youth do not feel safe in all communities
- Equity should be increased between communities
- Respect everyone as you want to be respected
- If you have power, you can make a change

Introduction

The University of Maryland School of Social Work (UMSSW) partnered with the Baltimore City Health Department (BCHD). They had these objectives in mind:

- “Complete a thorough review of data-sharing practices and policies among child- and youth-serving municipal agencies and grassroots community organizations to improve coordination and delivery of trauma-informed services.”
- “Research and report on Baltimore City’s future plan for referring children and youth who have experienced trauma to behavioral health services”
- “Oversee the completion of two community conversations facilitated by Baltimore City youth leaders for youth participants to gather data on young people’s perspectives of racial disparities among Baltimore City children and youth regarding exposure to violence and trauma as well as access to behavioral health services.”

In order to complete these objectives, they reached out to the ambassadors of Healing Youth Alliance (HYA). HYA is a youth-led organization that addresses mental health in the Black community. They were tasked with facilitating community conversations of 20 youth participants about race and trauma, analyzing data gathered in those conversations, and creating a brief report and presentation on their findings. This work was important to the ambassadors selected to take part in the project because it was relatable and they are extremely passionate about changes that happen to them and around them. Youth deserve a seat at the table and they represented Baltimore City’s youth.

Process

Methods

HYA ambassadors were selected in January 2022 by the adult mentors on the team. The selected HYA ambassadors were notified via text and confirmed their participation in the project. Before recruitment, ambassadors took time to create the questions that facilitators would ask in the focus groups. They drafted questions after discussion and sought feedback from their adult mentor, Brandie Cunningham. She sent input on the questions, and ambassadors took and applied the feedback. To recruit 20 youth for the focus groups, the youth created a flier and utilized Instagram and word of mouth to notify their peers about a paid opportunity that could assist them with sharing their voices. Youth who were interested, available, and met standards filled out a google form with their name, demographics, contact information, and payment information. The focus groups were conducted virtually via Zoom for an hour. Facilitators welcomed participants to the Zoom room and began the focus group 5 minutes after the designated start time. Facilitators took turns asking prewritten questions. They had all participants answer the questions in the chat and orally. Facilitators would ask follow-up questions to gain clarity and deeper understanding. Upon completion of the focus group, participants were paid 25 dollars via their preferred payment method, which includes CashApp and Paypal.

The Timeline



Jan. 2022

HYA ambassadors are selected and introduction meeting is held.

Participant recruitment begins.

Feb. 2022

Focus Group 1 is held.

Apr. 2022

Focus Group 2 is held.

May 2022

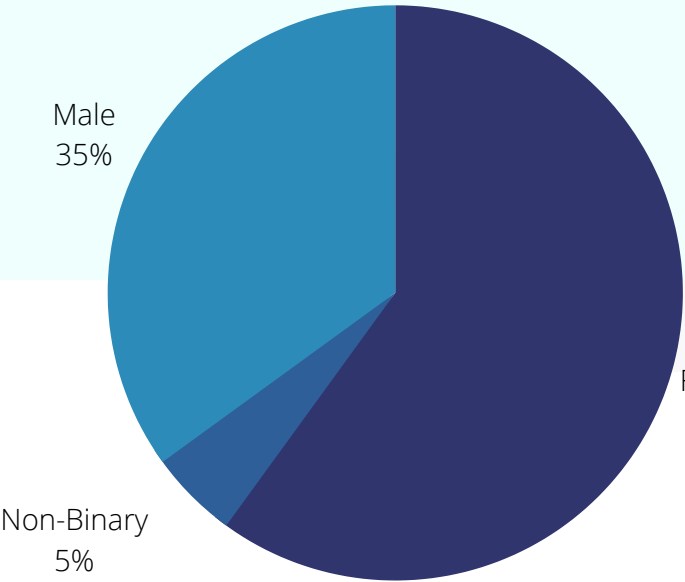
Participant recruitment ends.

Focus Group 3 is held.

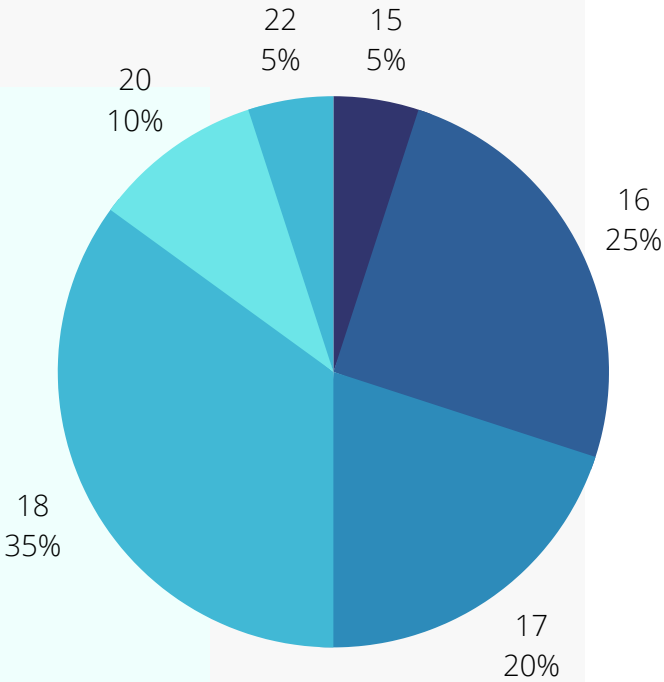
Responses are coded, and presentation is made.

Participants

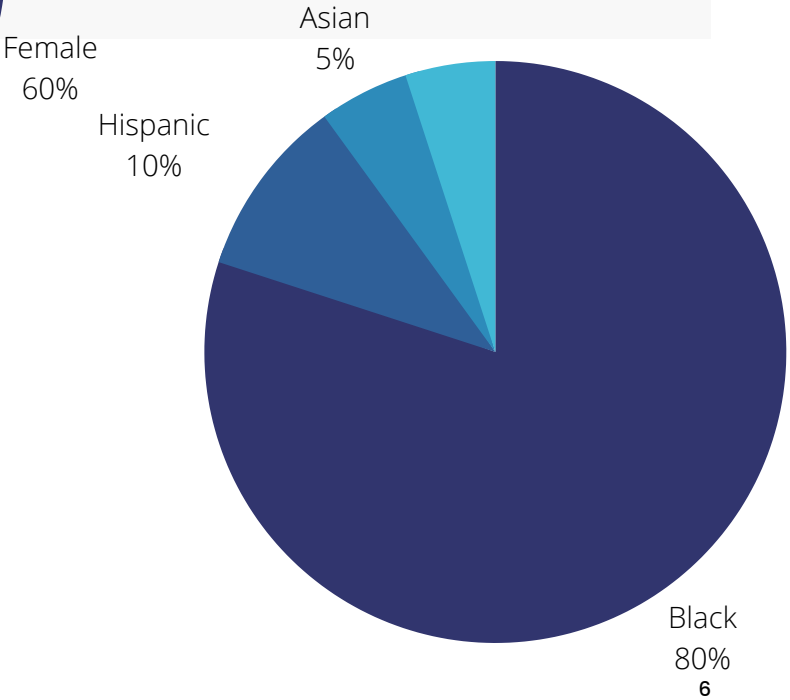
Gender



Age



Race/Ethnicity



Questions



01

Facilitators asked open-ended and probing questions, which included the following:

02

What is an issue in your community that is important to you?

03

Do you feel safe in your community? Why or why not?

04

As a youth in Baltimore City, what are some things you have learned to do or practice to protect yourself?

Themes

As a youth in Baltimore, what is something in your community that you are proud of?

- Seeing the community come together as one
- Seeing policy change for both social and political issues
- The city's creativity

What is an issue in your community that is important to you?

- Violence within our community
- Mental health
- Conditions of schools
- Homelessness, lack of resources, and inadequate education

Do you feel safe in your community? Why or why not?

- They feel safe depending on where they are
- Do not feel safe, just immune to the violence in the community

Who do you seek protection or safety with?:

- People they love, such as family and friends

How do the communities around you differ in terms of safety?

- Some communities lack protection from law enforcement and misuse their power
- Some communities have a lot of protection (more than others)

Themes

As a youth in Baltimore City, what are some things you have learned to do or practice to protect yourself?

- It's become a habit to "watch my surroundings, seeing if I see the same car twice when I am walking, or I'm always looking around."
- "Being observant, especially pumping gas, I make sure I look around and check to make sure I'm not leaving the doors open."
- "When walking outside, I can't play music because I'm always on guard."

How has social media impacted your exposure to trauma or violence?

- Social media creates space for unlimited exposure to trauma
 - Police brutality, BLM, etc.
- People share any and everything, which sometimes is unnecessary
 - Cyber bullying
- As the participants get older, the things seen on social media are more relatable, and they hit home
 - Traumatic events
- People from different racial backgrounds face heightened exposure, and it takes a toll on them
 - Mentally

Themes

When or where do you witness youth being treated differently because of their race?

- Denied entry into a store (Hispanic youth)
- Being followed in stores
- Being told to go back where you came from in addition to being denied entry into a store
- “Why are you speaking Spanish in America?”

Who or what organization makes you feel most supported, and what do they do to make you feel comfortable when receiving support?

- “Nobody, we’ve had a target on our back since we’ve been born.”
- “People go off what they see, so nobody because they don’t care.”
- “HeartSmiles & HYA (Healing Youth Alliance) for sure are non-profit organizations that support me and my cousin’s mom who is a therapist.”
- “I’ve never heard of any Hispanic organizations”

Themes

What kind of behavioral health services, such as counseling, therapy, and case management, are available at your school or in your community for youth?

- “At my school, we have a therapist, who you can email if you want to talk to her but anything else you have to pay for.”
- “We don’t really have any at my school. We have counselors, but they are mostly busy, so it’s not really anybody we can talk to at school.”
- “The student resource officers at my school talk to the students more than the counselors.”

Recommendations

Using the themes collected from focus groups, this report should inspire all people in power to get up and make a change.



The Call to Action includes:

- ☒ Increasing Baltimore City's safety through equity of resources
- ☒ Creating programs that allow all community members to express their creativity
- ☒ Creating a youth advisory board for policy changes regarding social and political issues
- ☒ Including everyone at the table who wants to be there
- ☒ Affirming all community members' value
- ☒ Respecting everyone no matter how they look and circumstances
- ☒ Using HeartSmilesMD and Healing Youth Alliance as resources for the projects created to ensure growth in the community
- ☒ Influencing limited intake of social media (increased exposure to trauma)

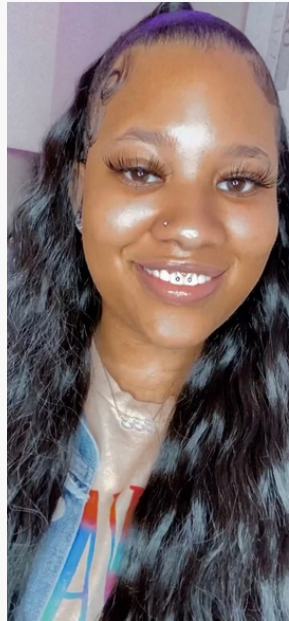
Conclusion

If you really care about the improvement of Baltimore City, tap into your network and share this report. People from the city and outside of the city often mistake it for a city full of poverty, drugs, and violence, but they should really see the potential. Yes, the community has been traumatized, but they need YOU. Yes, the youth are losing hope, so they need YOU. Everyone plays a critical role in making these difficult changes happen. Throughout this report, you should be able to identify that even in a city full of people of minority races, youth do not feel safe because of that reason. Realize that the changes will not be made instantly, but as you continue doing the work, the city will improve. Everyone has a call to action, but it will take as many people as possible to see the change come to fruition.

Our Super Team



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Thank You

Acknowledgements

This report is part of the *Addressing Intersections of Race and Violence Against Children and Youth* project at the National Association of County and City Health Organizations (NACCHO), funded by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (NCIPC). The views expressed within do not necessarily represent those of the sponsor.

