2020

Mental Health

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DOMINO

About us

The Domino Project, a peer led for and by Black LGBTTQ+ youth (16-29 years old) in Toronto. This 24-month pilot project funded by OTF's Youth Opportunities Fund and is a joint venture between the Black Queer Youth Collective (BQYC) and Parkdale Queen West Community Health Center (PQWCHC).

Introducing The Domino Table Talk

The Domino project introduced the Domino Table talk, an eclectic online series consisting of five online discussions. On June 15, we held part 3 of the series with a discussion on Mental Health to focus on how youth were coping amidst the coronavirus pandemic and strategies folks use to improve their mental wellbeing.
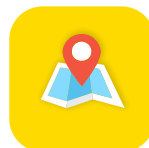
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Background

Mental health has been a hot topic since the start of 2020 with the proclamation of the first annual Black Mental health day announced on March 2, 2020 and the first Monday thereafter. Following Black History month, community members organized to raise awareness about the emotional and psychological impact of slavery and anti-black racism within Toronto's Black community. Additionally, building on the discussion from Part 1 of our series on the Impacts of COVID-19 on LGBTQ youth, we wanted to continue the conversation to better understand the factors and

Storytime

We asked our panelist, what are the top 3 things that affect your Mental health. A panelist shared the following story.

"I could start from the beginning when I was entering high school before I entered high school I come from a very big Jamaican family with a lot of older siblings so being the Queer kid the obvious Queer kid they kind of isolate me from bullying being teased until I went to high school and then when I went to high school I developed anxiety going to school I would literally watch the sun come up in the morning from not sleeping and over time that became a kind of default off setting. So anxiety is one of them. And when I migrated here to Canada I felt like I was over it I wasn't so prevalent anymore until then my mom passed and then it came back. And it becomes something of a constant now. And social anxiety is one of them. I don't like to be on other peoples time. I know it feels very selfish. But if I have this time of time constraint then I become I obsess about it, about making the time commitment. So time commitment, anxiety. I think to a lesser degree, to a lesser degree, the thing about feeling like an imposter, imposter syndrome, having for most all my life, having other people's expectation of me, projected on me. so even now it's still a default even though I'm aware of it that I carry this kind of imposter syndrome having been assigned male at birth and um having to um perform maleness I developed this kind of Imposter syndrome because I couldn't connect with maleness but I was expected to present and be male. So it transfers even to date having transitioned and living my truth I still carry some of that imposter syndrome with me through life." Panelist

Top 3 Things That Affect Black Youth Mental Health

Heteronormativity & Societal pressure to conform or perform gender. As a Trans woman the trauma of having to perform maleness in a specific way.

Over policing of Black bodies

Intergenerational and vicarious trauma - Experiences of racism growing up and feelings of anxiousness and anxiety with engaging with public i.e.. Attending school and group gatherings

BARRIERS
5 Barriers To Accessing Mental Health Supports

1. Lack of cultural competency – Often service providers are not Black and can't identify with the experiences of Black people

2. Lack of diversity of staffing – "more often than not you don't find POC to help you with Mental health issues"

3. Past negative experiences accessing Mental health services

4. Stigma and prejudice – perception of black people when accessing care

5. Lack of Financial support

RECOMMENDATIONS
5 Recommendations To Improving Access To Mental Health Support

1. Discomforts recommending supports due to negative experiences and a need to be more self-sufficient.

2. Creating access points I.e. Peer support, caring adults,

3. Major delay in access for support amplified in Black Community

4. Staffing – ensure youth have access to culturally component professionals to provide services

5. Improved accessibility for youth with disabilities

Stigma and Prejudice

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Stigma is a negative stereotype. Stigma is a reality for many people with a mental illness, and they report that how others judge them is one of their greatest barriers to a complete and satisfying life.

Mainstream media and social media are known to perpetuate negative stereotypes about Black people. Panelist reflected on how Black bodies are dehumanized and Black children and youth are often criminalized for non-criminal offenses in media. These negative images contribute to the fear and unconscious biases about Black people.

One panelist shared that "We see how the media no matter how innocent black bodies are or even before they are tried, they are criminalized in the media before a kind of discourse, a kind of trial, a kind of proven. It seems Black people have the burden of proven themselves innocent in all situations at all times when it comes to media."

Prejudice is a baseless and often negative preconception or attitude towards members of a group.

Psychological Impact Of Anti-black Racism In The Media

"In this moment lots of us are watching the videos that we are seeing online and it's not just the fact that we're witnessing violence and ya know I think the dominant conversation we've become desensitized to it. But particularly in the last case. I tend to watch all of them but ya know what became clear is when you're watching some of these videos, you're actually seeing something very traumatic your actually witnessing a murder for all intent purpose and for me I've had to come to terms with what I've witnessed to understand all the things I was feeling."

Cycle of Victimization

- Lack of awareness – ignoring the issue of anti-black racism
- Avoidance and denial – pretending trauma didn't happen
- Public shame and guilt – some families are secretive and don't discuss issues or challenges within the household openly.
- Fear
- Victimization

The figure illustrates the cycle that many Black LGBTQ+ youth may go through when they experience trauma from anti-black racism. This cycle can also apply to other aspects of their life that affects their Mental Health. To better support youth with Mental health challenges, we need more spaces to openly discuss Mental health issues.
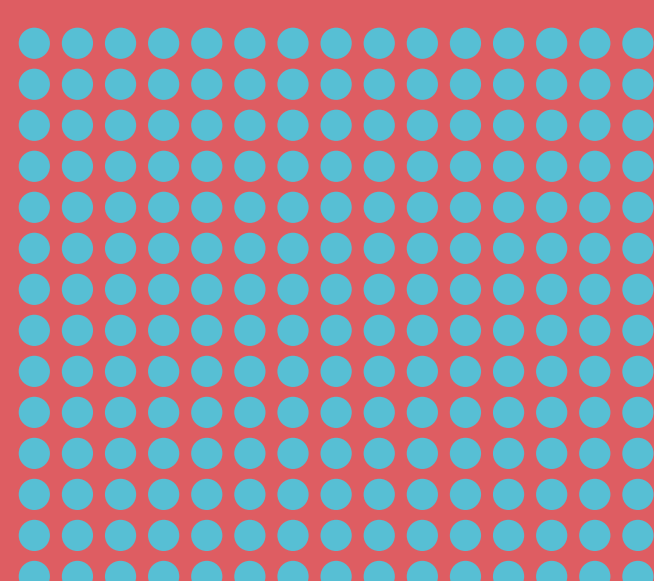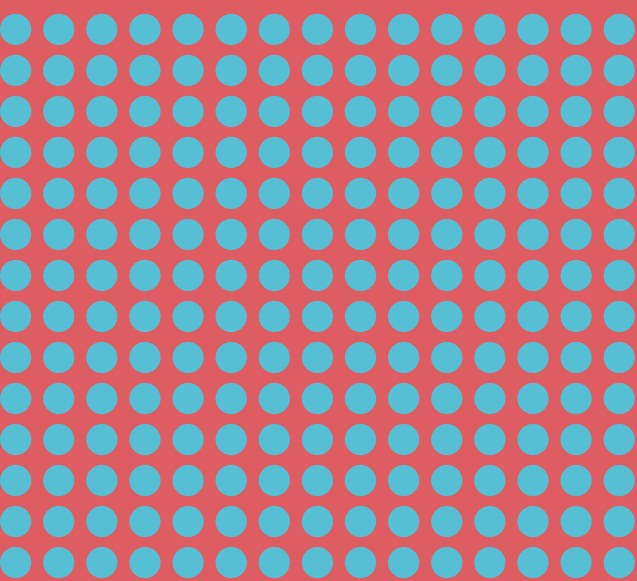
Resources

Black Mental Health day https://www.blackmentalhealthday.ca/
Pathways to care https://www.pathwaystocare.ca/
Across Boundaries https://www.acrossboundaries.ca/
Affirmation deck http://teenhealthsource.com/blog/resource-affirmations-deck/

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i Black Mental Health Day https://www.blackmentalhealthday.ca/
ii Canadian Mental Health Association- Stigma and Discrimination

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