The Black, African and Caribbean Canadian Health (BLACCH) Study: Phase I Preliminary Findings

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Abstract

The Black, African, and Caribbean Canadian Health (BLACCH) Study is an interdisciplinary, mixed-methods, community-based study focused on better understanding health and HIV in African, Caribbean and Black (ACB) communities in Middlesex County, Ontario. To date, studies concerned with health and HIV in ACB communities have taken place in large urban centres and have a lack of information regarding the lives of ACB communities in suburban and rural areas. This study was designed to capture the wide range of experience and knowledge of ACB communities in small urban centres in Ontario. Interviews were conducted to obtain...
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The Black, African and Caribbean Canadian Health (BLACCH) Study:

There should be more of an ACB presence in HIV/AIDS, health and social service organizations

ACB persons need to be represented in organizations. This includes hiring ACB personnel to provide services and including images of ACB persons in publications and promotional materials.

The easiest answer is to have people of varied cultures working for their organization. That’s my solution… it sure makes a difference…Their [service providers’] intention is genuine and sincere, but they just don’t get it, and it’s very frustrating because you can’t say it, “cause if you say it, it’s like you’re offending them and they’re pissed off, because they’re just like: ‘we’re here, extending ourselves to you and it’s still not good enough’… that’s not what we’re about. I can’t be bothered to sit down there and pussy-foot around your feelings to make you feel good about attempts you’re making that really don’t cut it.

The bottom line is within our own communities, we have to train people to have the education to provide the services, and people hate hearing that, it’s like you come sort of segregationist in how you’re speaking, and that’s not what I’m advocating, but the bottom-line is there’s certain things that I understand and know because of who I am as a Black woman that I bring to the table that isn’t explained to me. It’s not described to me. It’s not something I studied in school, it’s just part of who I am and it’s, if I’m what I bring to the table, in the same way that what a Latino or White colleague brings to the table is an experience that no matter how much I may like their food, or the way they look or dress, and think it’s neat; I could try to immerse myself till the cows come home in their culture; I’m still not gonna be them, and I’m not gonna bring that to the table, so you gotta have the actual people in place”.

Organizations need to have multiple employees from ACB communities with different ethnic backgrounds

Some persons will not access services at an organization if someone from their ethnoculture is present in the organization. This is too close for comfort, as many persons are isolated within their ethnic communities.

“I think a lot of the barriers are around stigma… the stigma that is presented within these communities… the difference between how a Black person from the Caribbean or Africa views HIV, as opposed to the Caucasian Canadian. Someone made an appointment; he came in, he saw me, and you know I recognized his accent, I knew he was from my country but I wouldn’t say anything unless he says something, but I think what that did to him, I think it shut him down…[it] would have taken a lot of courage for him to come in, in the first place, and then to be met by someone from his country, which is very uncomfortable for him and shut right down. He said to me, ‘I’m not going to tell you anything’. So from someone for the health care system, if it’s me… (someone from the Caribbean community)… then if [the person] were to test HIV positive… even though I’m bound by confidentiality…[the person] would still be afraid that somehow, it’s going to get back to [the person’s] community and [the person] doesn’t want anyone to know.”

Health and social service organizations need to build trust with ACB communities

Many ACB persons are reluctant to access services because they do not trust that their information will be confidential, or that the service providers will not be judgemental. This trust can be built by having more ACB representation in organizations.

“I didn’t want to go to a pre-natal class [held at] the organization within which I worked. I didn’t want to have everybody all in my personal business, which tends to be a characteristic of many of the people in our community. We are very private people, but those classes were quite beneficial to me and the health of my unborn child.”

[Everyone in this life is about relationships and if people don’t trust your organization. If people don’t know your organization, and or trust them, they’re not gonna avail themselves of your services, no matter how good those services might be.”

Rather than asking ACB persons to seek services and information, service providers should bring services and information to ACB communities

Since there is a lack of trust between ACB communities and service providers, many ACB persons do not access services and do not believe service providers are sincere. By bringing services and information to these communities, service providers will build trust with ACB communities.

“They have it set up for the North American people. It’s just set up for the way it’s acceptable in this society I guess. So anyone else that feels like their culture is not accepted, kind of has to suck it up, because they’ve already set up everything [the health care system] how they want it.”

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The Internet and word-of-mouth (friends, health care providers, news media) were the avenues through which most people received health related information.

“I need [health information], I go online. I talk to people because when I do research, I do run around asking people their experience with a certain issue, and I do go to the doctor and ask them too sometimes; and the urgent clinic…"

Health is viewed holistically, and participants largely classified themselves as healthy

Participants defined health as being both physiological and psychological. Some focused on overall balance and well-being, and some affiliated with diet with diet and moderately healthy.

“Health means to me… a lifestyle, it always relates to a lifestyle… your diet. It could also mean what your blood pressure is; what your sugar levels are; if you have any sicknesses or diseases or things like that.”

“Health means being in a good, healthy condition; feeling well; the wellness of your body, mind, and also your psychological security. You feel secured.”

Diabetes and HIV are important health issues in the community

Majority of the participants believed diabetes and HIV are important health issues in the Black community, but many participants do not know about HIV in Canada.

“I was doing a clinic placement with Lawson Diabetes Center, now it’s St. Joseph’s Centre… for a period of about 6 months… at that time, I saw about two Black clients, one aboriginal client, and one Hispanic [client]…[During that time, as part of presentations] I talked about diabetes, it’s prevalence and stuff like that, and I remember a part of my presentation [to a group]; everyday, we would have a group of about 6-10… and every time I would say ‘that diabetes is prevalent in blacks like me, in Hispanics, in Aborigins’ and stuff like that. [After being there and doing these presentations for quite a while, it dawned on me, ‘where are all these Black people? Diabetes is prevalent in these populations…’[yet] I’ve only seen these 4 people… where are they?”

“[HIV] is a big problem in our community. It’s just as a taboo, we don’t talk about it. It’s as if it’s not there, but it affected me back home; so many of my cousins, my relatives died of HIV. Here, [friends of mine] go back home… and it’s easy to get contracted with HIV. They don’t talk about it. It’s a taboo, so of course I worry about that.”

Many people obtain health information through the Internet

"Health means being in a good, healthy condition; feeling well; the wellness of your body, mind, and also your psychological security. You feel secured.”