

Understanding the Concept of Intersectionality

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Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are common in the United States and significantly impact mental health throughout the lifespan. Intersectionality provides a framework for understanding how different social identities connect and overlap to create different experiences and impacts of trauma. Research demonstrates there are differences in relationships between ACE and mental health (Zhang & Monnat, 2022). According to statistics for US adults, 64% have experienced at least one ACE. Nationally, one in ten children has experienced three or more ACEs, and in Ohio, it is one in seven. For ethnically and racially diverse youths, the exposure to at least one ACE is higher (61% for Blacks and 51% for Hispanics) compared to whites (40%) and Asians (23%). These factors significantly impact mental health throughout the lifespan, and research shows that the presence and prevalence of ACEs especially correlate to adolescents' mental health.

Intersectionality refers to how individuals and groups are shaped and impacted by multiple social positions in terms of race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, marital status, political belief, religion, immigration status, and mental or physical abilities.

(Reynolds, 2022)

Individuals with minority and marginalized identities are at a greater risk of experiencing trauma while facing multiple forms of discrimination which can greatly impact their mental health. Minimizing the stress-related symptoms resulting from discrimination, including racial discrimination and other traumatic events can create a unique compounding stress experience.

Culturally Responsive Professionals:

- Advocate for clients by acknowledging their identities and how they intersect.
- Consider the influence of power dynamics and how the therapist's cultural background could impact engagement, retention, and treatment outcomes.
- Implement multicultural approaches and develop conceptualizations using models that considerate marginalized and underserved individuals such as: The Developmental and Ecological Model of Youth Racial Trauma, Culturally-Informed Adverse Childhood Experiences Framework, Healing Ethno and Racial Trauma (HEART) Framework, and the ADDRESSING Model Framework.

Addressing mental health symptoms associated with trauma and stress do not address the systemic issues for those with minority and marginalized identities. It is important for mental health professionals to also address the systemic inequities and advocate for policy change at the local and national level.

This product was created by our valued partners at the Ohio Association of County Behavioral Health Authorities (OACBHA). You can find more resources and training opportunities on their website: oacbha.org.