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Topic: Investigating the Application of Mental Health First Aid Among Black Church Leaders.

Project Summary

Black people make up a significant portion of the rural population in southern Kentucky, and there are over 500 churches in Kentucky with predominantly Black congregations (Data USA, 2022; General Association of Baptists in Kentucky, 2022). Limited data exist on Black mental health resources in southern Kentucky, yet Black Kentuckians navigate various mental health concerns (e.g., depression, substance abuse) (Commonwealth of Kentucky, 2018; Nelson, 2022), racial/ethnic disparities (e.g., insurance, economic, and housing disparities; US Census Bureau, 2020), and race-based stressors/racial trauma (Dastagir, 2021). Further, Black religious/spiritual communities may experience mental health stigma, silence or have limited information about mental health signs and symptoms or how to address a mental health crisis (Armstrong, 2021; Dempsey et al., 2016; Montgomery, 2020). Despite these concerns, Black religion/spirituality is also associated with numerous strengths (e.g., peace, community and education) (Gates, 2022) that positively impact Black people's mental health, and Black church leaders are often at the forefront of these strengths. This mixed-methods longitudinal project will equip Black church leaders (i.e., pastors, first ladies, deacons, choir directors) in Southern Kentucky with Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training and examine their application of MHFA in their church communities.