The Black Girl Health Agenda
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SITE: NEW VOICES FOR REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE

• An organization focused on building a social change movement dedicated to the health and wellbeing of Black women and girls through leadership development, human rights, and reproductive justice.

• The SistahSpeak! Youth Project™ (SYP!) of New Voices for Reproductive Justice is a leadership development program based on the foundation of developing healthy, whole, and powerful young Black women, girls, and femmes in the city of Pittsburgh.

• Through their programs and special events, SYP! creates safe and youth-centered spaces that celebrate and affirm the beauty, power, and resilience of what it means to be a Black woman.

The inequalities affecting Black girls in Pittsburgh communities provide barriers that impede their wellbeing and academic success; they include poverty, education, juvenile justice, violence/abuse, and child welfare. The intersectionality of these barriers is an important aspect of what it means to be healthy. Understanding the deeper significance of these disparities will mean actively engaging Black women and girls to learn about their experiences. The Black Girl Health Agenda (BGHA) is an initiative designed to amplify and bolster the voices of young Black women, girls, and femmes. The first stage is to create and center dialogue around the lived experiences of these groups of individuals. Development of the BGHA was divided into four phases. In phase 1, the concept of the BGHA was introduced to our target group and information about the issues they felt most impacted their health was gathered. In phase 2, focus groups were held to discuss the information gathered in phase 1. Phase 3 focused primarily on increasing awareness of the BGHA through talks and social media posts. Phase 4 consisted of a cumulative report outlining the BGHA and its relevance to our target population. The preliminary survey was sent to 15 people who expressed interest in completing it. Of this, nine girls completed the survey. With regards to how they would change Pittsburgh for themselves and other Black women, girls, and femmes many of the responses focused on equality and more respect for Black women. They envisioned safe spaces as places where Black women could be themselves and comfortable. For them, complete health and wellbeing meant taking care of themselves, staying healthy, and making the right choices. The question that focused on reproductive justice seemed to be a bit more confusing for the respondents. Many were not sure what it meant (44.4%), but a few answers included the freedom to choose to have children (22.2%). Only one person responded with the true definition of reproductive justice. These are the very beginning stages of the Black Girl Health Agenda. The major goal of this phase was to initiate discussion about the issues impacting the health of young Black women, girls, and femmes in Pittsburgh. In many ways, this goal was achieved. However, there is still a tremendous amount of work that needs to be done to get the Agenda to a point where it is a meaningful resource.

METHODS

• Developed in four phases:
  Phase I: introduce the concept of the Black Girl Health Agenda to target group.
  Phase II: based on the information in phase I, present a draft of the Agenda to our target population to obtain feedback.
  Phase III: increase awareness of the BGHA.
  Phase IV: cumulative report outlining the BGHA and its relevance to our target population.

• Tools used:
  Phase I: creation of an outreach plan, tabling and marketing material, and a preliminary survey.
  Phase 2: mini youth presentations and focus groups.
  Phase 3: outreach tabling at E3 (Educate, Empower, Enlighten) events, social media posts on Facebook, mini talks during SYP! sessions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the United Health Foundation/National Medical Fellowships Diverse Medical Scholars Program for their support. My host site, New Voices Pittsburgh, and Mentor, Ashley Chan, for allowing me to be a part of the organization and spearhead the development of the Black Girl Health Agenda. Finally, thank you to Hill House Passport Academy Charter School and everyone who took the time to complete the survey.

REFERENCES


RESULTS

• In total, the preliminary survey was sent to 15 people who expressed interest in completing it. Of this, nine girls completed the survey. Most were between the ages of 18-20 (66.7%) and in the 12th grade (55.6%) of high school. The neighborhoods where these girls lived included Pittsburgh, Penn Hills, Ross Township, McKees Rocks, McKeesport, and West View.

• With regards to how they would change Pittsburgh for themselves and other Black women, girls, and femmes many of the responses focused on equality and more respect for Black women. They envisioned safe spaces as places where Black women could be themselves and comfortable. For them, complete health and wellbeing meant taking care of themselves, staying healthy, and making the right choices. The question that focused on reproductive justice seemed to be a bit more confusing for the respondents. Many were not sure what it meant (44.4%), but a few answers included the freedom to choose to have children (22.2%). Only one person responded with the true definition of reproductive justice.

CONCLUSIONS

• These are the very beginning stages of the BGHA.
• The major goal of this phase was to initiate discussion about the issues impacting the health of young Black women, girls, and femmes in Pittsburgh.
• A tremendous amount of work needs to be done to get the Agenda to a point where it is a meaningful resource.
• Moving forward, outreach is key for sustainability.
• Recommendations: a more comprehensive survey with specific questions needs to be created and used.

OBJECTIVES

• Create and center dialogue around the lived experiences of young Black women, girls, and femmes in Pittsburgh.
• Serve as a local reproductive justice strategy to proactively protect and advocate for the health and wellbeing of young Black women, girls, and femmes.

BACKGROUND

• The inequalities affecting Black girls in Pittsburgh communities provide barriers that impede their wellbeing and academic success; they include poverty, education, juvenile justice, violence/abuse, and child welfare.1
• In Pittsburgh, 55% of Black girls are living in poverty.1
• Black girls are 3 times as likely to be suspended from school as White girls.1
• Black girls are more likely to report higher rates of child abuse, family violence, and victimization.1
• Racism, sexism, and living in a low-income neighborhood make some young people more likely to come to the attention of system officials than others.1
• Understanding the deeper significance of these disparities will mean actively engaging Black women and girls to learn about their experiences.

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