The Udada Project: Empowering Mental Health Support for Black Girls and Women – *National Survey Report, 2024*

Introduction:

The Udada Project, led by Future Black Female, aims to address mental health disparities among Black girls and women in Canada by developing culturally responsive services. The project focuses on evaluating and expanding mental health services, reducing mental health issues, and improving overall outcomes for Black female youth.

Objectives:

- Evaluate and expand services tailored for Black girls and women.
- Improve mental health outcomes.

Importance: The Udada National Survey identifies gaps in mental health data, particularly for immigrant and minority groups, helping to develop inclusive support systems.

Approach:

- Assess the current mental health landscape and identify barriers.
- Develop and implement culturally sensitive interventions.
- Raise awareness about mental health disparities.

Outputs:

- Comprehensive evaluation report.
- Culturally responsive interventions.
- Virtual mental health platform.
- Training programs for professionals.

Goals:

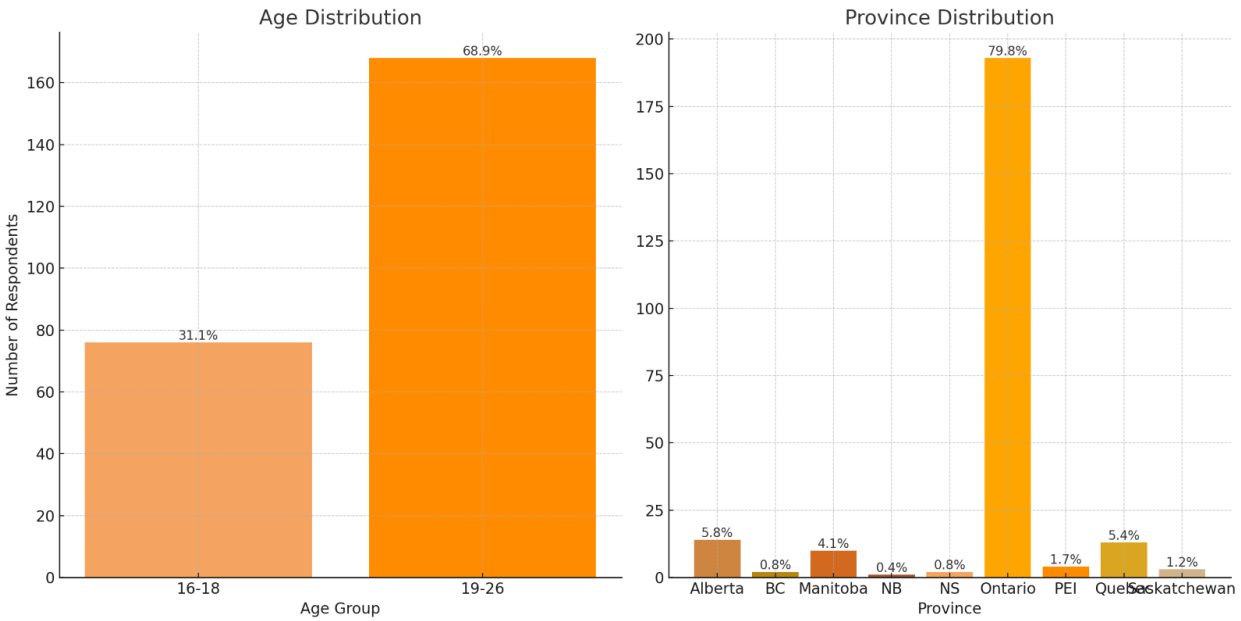
- Increase access to suitable mental health services.
- Achieve significant improvements in mental and emotional health.
- Empower Black girls and women with essential mental health management skills.
- Establish a durable support network.

Udada National Survey

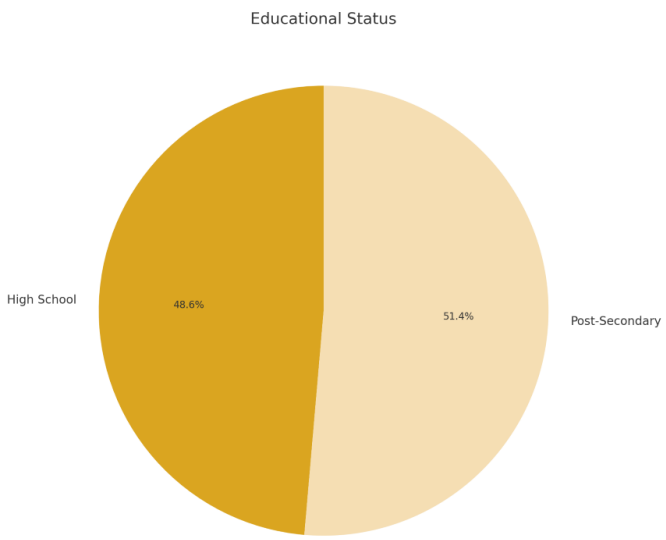
The Udada National Survey aims to address a critical information gap regarding the mental health of Black girls and women in Canada. Current data indicates that Black female youth are particularly vulnerable, with 12% experiencing higher rates of depression and anxiety compared to 5% of their male peers. However, there is a significant lack of detailed data on mental health issues, such as depression and suicidal thoughts, among immigrant, refugee, and other minority groups.

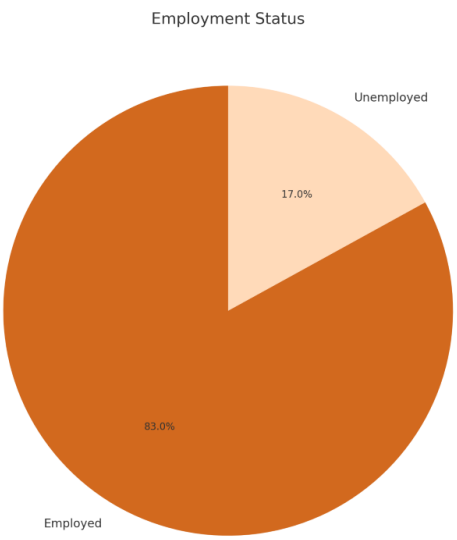
This lack of comprehensive information hinders the ability to provide mental health services that meet the specific needs of these communities. By identifying the barriers that Black girls and women face in accessing mental health care and understanding the prevalence of these conditions, the survey aims to develop effective and inclusive support systems tailored to their unique challenges.

Demographics:

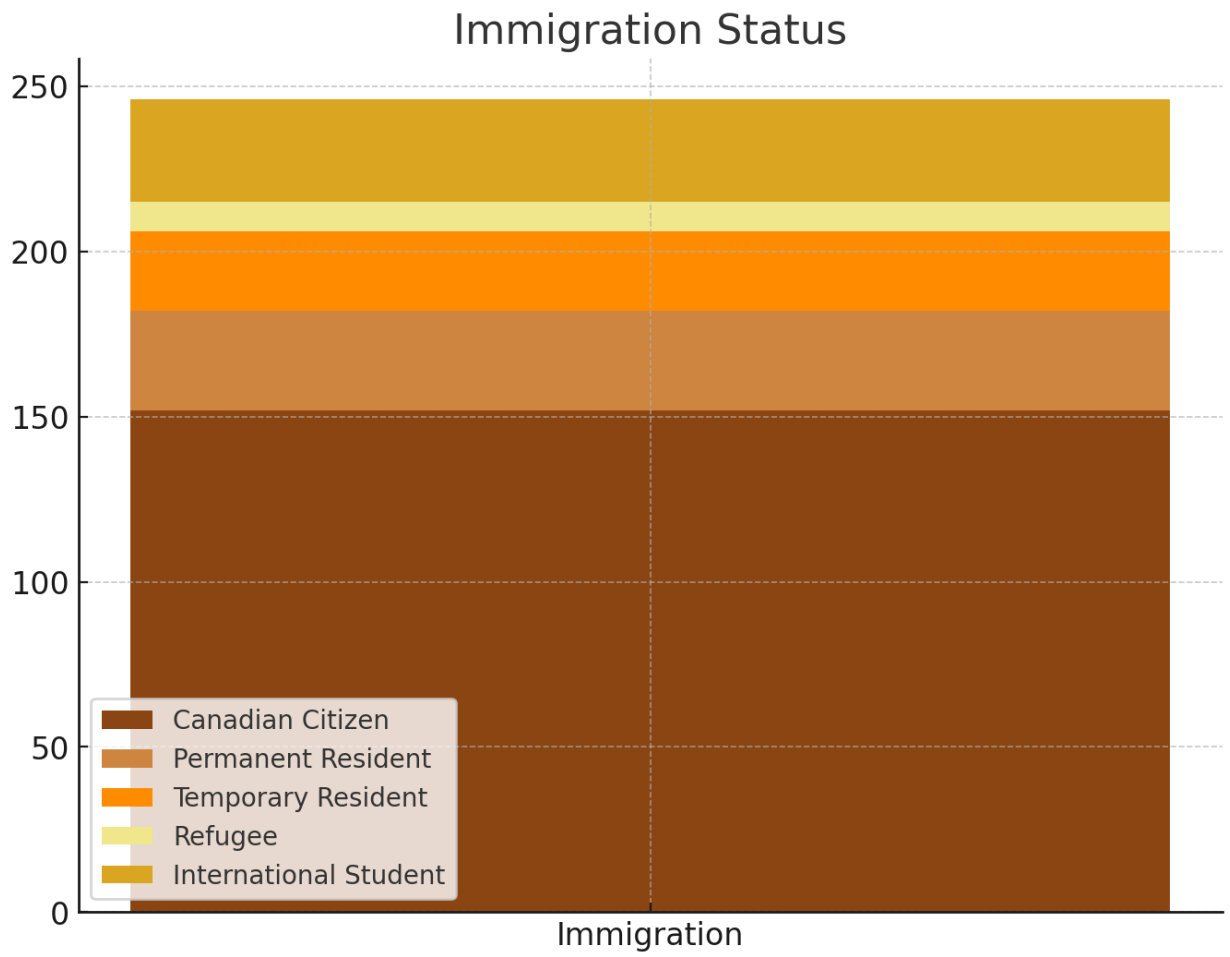


The first chart shows the Age Distribution of respondents. The second chart represents the province distribution, highlighting the number of respondents from each province.





The first pie chart illustrates the educational status of respondents, differentiating between those in high school and those in post-secondary education.
The second pie chart displays the Employment Status, showing the proportions of employed versus unemployed respondents.



The stacked bar chart presents the immigration statuses of surveyed Black girls and women in Canada, with a prominent number of Canadian Citizens and a substantial presence of International Students.

Insights drawn from the Survey's Demographic Data

The survey's demographic data provides crucial insights for shaping mental health interventions across Canada, highlighting the specific needs in Ontario and broader national requirements. The diverse educational backgrounds of respondents indicate a need for mental health services that cater to various literacy levels, ensuring universal access. The significant employment rate among respondents also suggests the benefit of integrating mental health programs in workplaces.

Participants reported a solid understanding of mental health, revealing an opportunity to advance existing programs to provide more comprehensive support. The varied immigration statuses of participants highlight the importance of culturally sensitive approaches tailored to

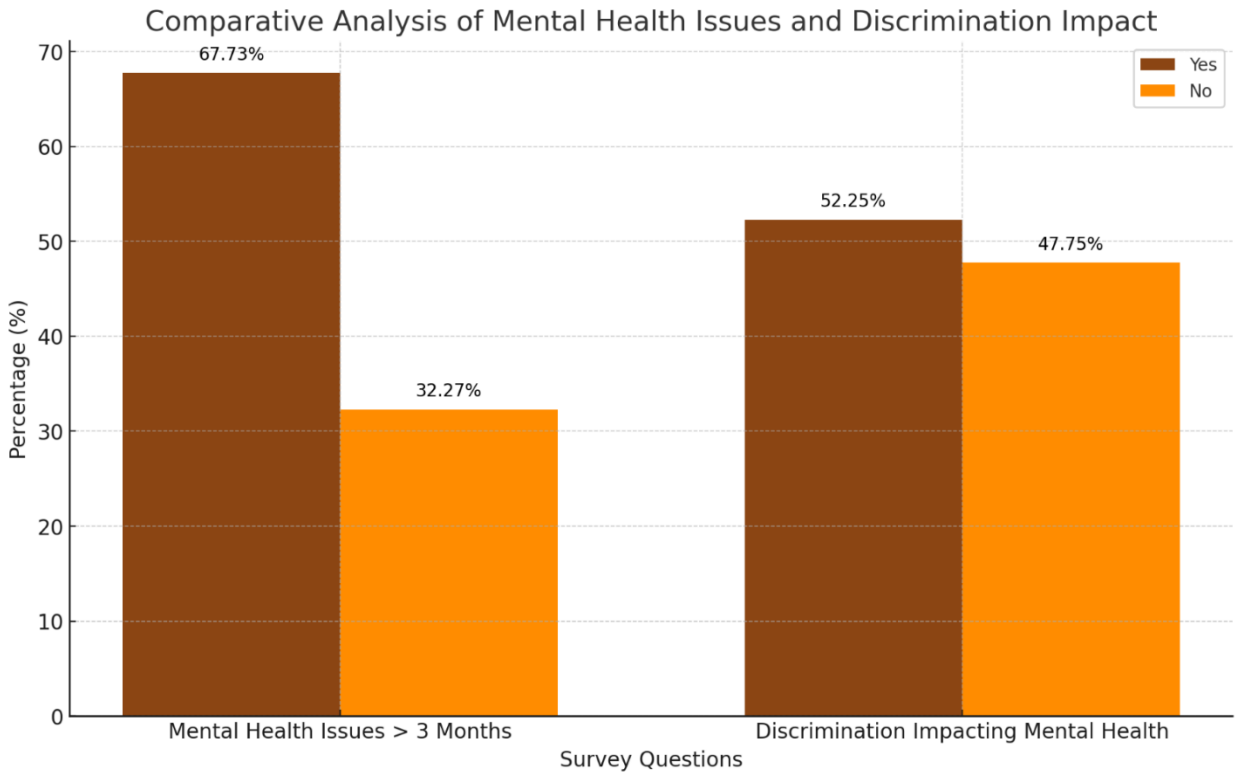
the unique needs of immigrants, refugees, and international students, focusing on empowerment and skill-building for mental health management.

The data also points to the necessity for a decentralized support system to serve the varied provincial demographics effectively. The high educational levels among respondents enable the potential for peer support roles, fostering a strong, community-driven support network.

Analysis of the Udada Survey revealed the following themes:

- Mental Health Challenges
- Community Attitudes and Stigma Towards Mental Health Concerns
- Coping Strategies and Mechanisms
- Mental Health Diagnosis
- Occurrence of Gender Based Violence (GBV)/Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)
- Thoughts of Suicide/Suicide Ideation
- Substance abuse

    - **Mental Health Challenges:** Reports on experiences with long-term mental health issues and the effects of discrimination.



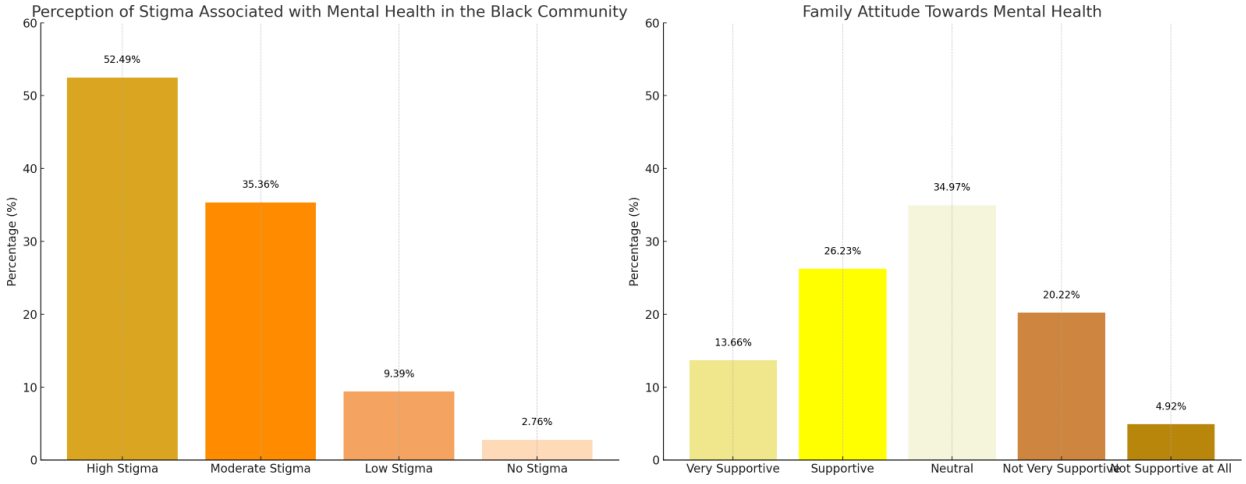
These bar charts present the findings related to mental health challenges faced by the participants, specifically their long-term mental health issues and experiences of discrimination affecting their mental health.

Insights drawn from Mental Health Challenges Experienced by Survey Respondents

A significant majority (67.73%) of respondents report long-term mental health issues lasting over three months, underscoring the widespread nature of these challenges and the critical need for ongoing support and interventions. Additionally, more than half (52.25%) attribute negative impacts on their mental health to discrimination and racism, highlighting these as major societal stressors requiring targeted anti-discrimination measures alongside mental health resources.
The data reveals a significant overlap between long-term mental health challenges and the impacts of discrimination, suggesting that experiences of discrimination may worsen long-term mental health conditions. This connection emphasizes the necessity for comprehensive support systems that address both clinical mental health needs and social determinants like discrimination and racism.

Furthermore, the varied experiences reported concerning discrimination's impact on mental health call for nuanced and inclusive policy-making that is sensitive to the diverse ways in which discrimination affects individuals within the community. This approach will ensure that policies effectively support those facing mental health challenges exacerbated by societal discrimination.

- **Community Attitudes and Stigma Towards Mental Health Concerns:** Explores stigma and support within families and the broader community.



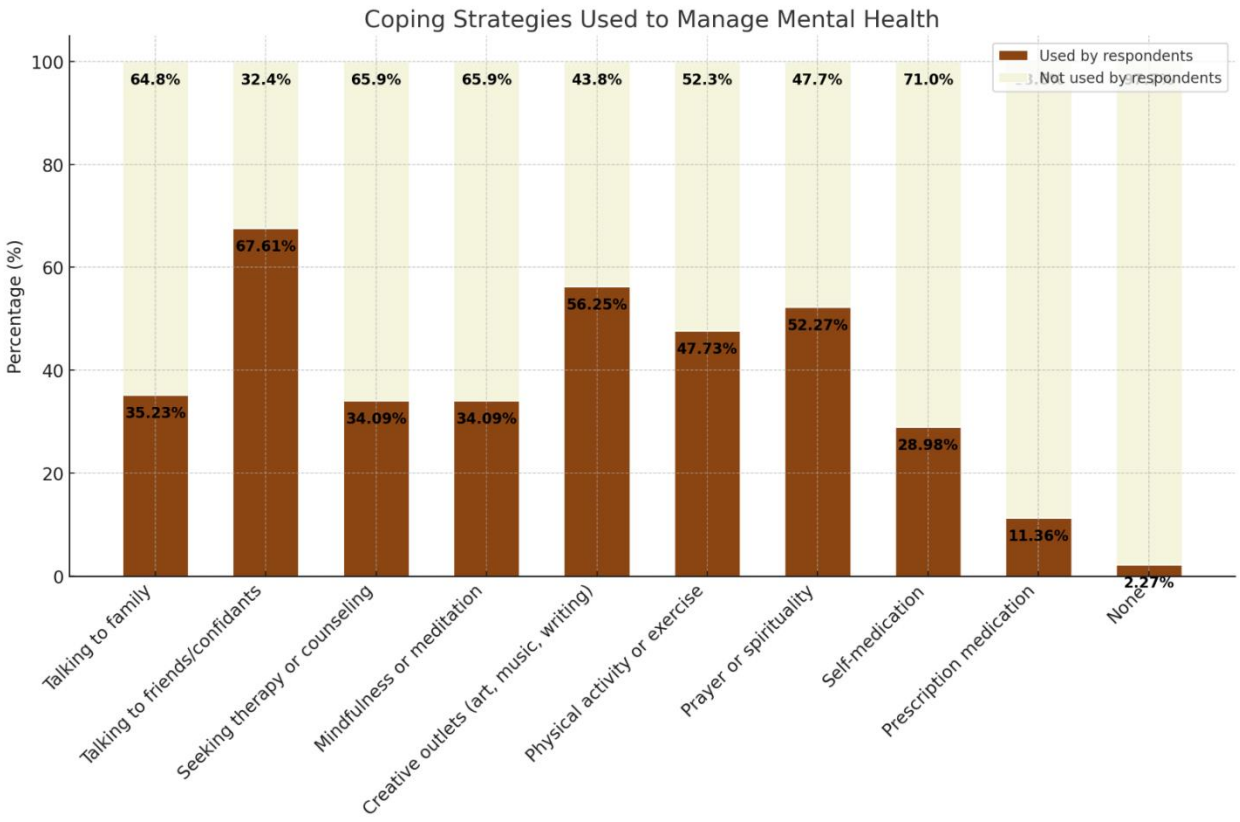
The left chart visualizes the distribution of responses regarding perceived stigma. High levels of stigma are most reported, followed by moderate, low, and no stigma.
The right chart displays the range of family attitudes towards mental health, from very supportive to not supportive at all. The most common response is neutral, with supportive and very supportive attitudes being less frequent.

Insights drawn from Attitudes and Stigma in the Context of Black Girls' Mental Health:

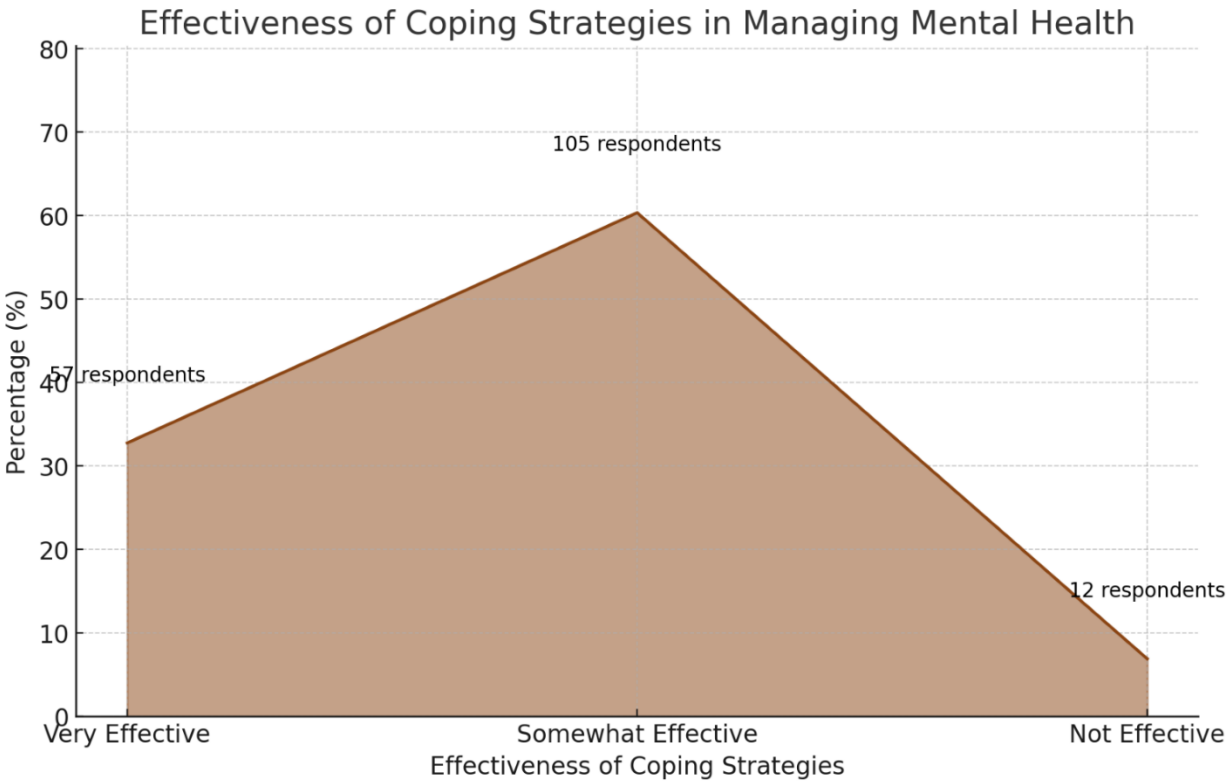
The survey reveals a significant perception of stigma within the Black community, with 52.49% of respondents indicating high levels of stigma associated with mental health issues. This stigma acts as a major barrier to seeking mental health support, reinforcing the Udada project's objective to reduce stigma and enhance mental health awareness. Furthermore, the varying levels of perceived stigma—moderate (35.36%), low (9.39%), and none (2.76%)—illustrate diverse attitudes towards mental health across different community segments. This diversity underscores the need for customized outreach and education that cater to specific attitudes within the community.

Family attitudes toward mental health also show significant variability, with 34.97% of families holding neutral views and 20.22% not being very supportive. These attitudes can deter Black girls from seeking necessary help, highlighting the critical need for family-focused interventions and educational programs to positively influence these perceptions. Although some families show support, with 13.66% being very supportive and 26.23% supportive, the existence of families that are not supportive at all (4.92%) points to a risk of isolation for some individuals facing mental health challenges. This situation calls for the establishment of more robust support networks within families to aid those in need.

- **Coping Strategies:** Reviews the effectiveness of various methods used by participants to manage their mental health.



The bar chart provides a comprehensive breakdown of the coping strategies used by respondents to manage mental health.



The area chart provides a visual representation of the effectiveness of coping strategies as perceived by respondents in managing mental health.
The findings suggest a diverse set of coping mechanisms, highlighting the importance of individualized approaches to mental health management. Encouragingly, the majority find their chosen strategies effective to some extent.

The data on coping strategies used by Black female youth in Canada tells a compelling story of resilience and resourcefulness. It reveals a diverse array of techniques employed to manage mental health, each reflecting personal preferences and the unique challenges faced by these individuals.

Insights drawn from coping strategies used by survey respondents

- **Social Support is Vital:** The most common strategy is talking to friends or confidants, utilized by over two-thirds of respondents, highlighting the importance of peer support.
- **Creative and Spiritual Outlets are Prominent:** More than half of the participants turn to creative activities and spiritual or religious practices, underscoring the value of these outlets in providing emotional relief and a sense of community or personal peace.

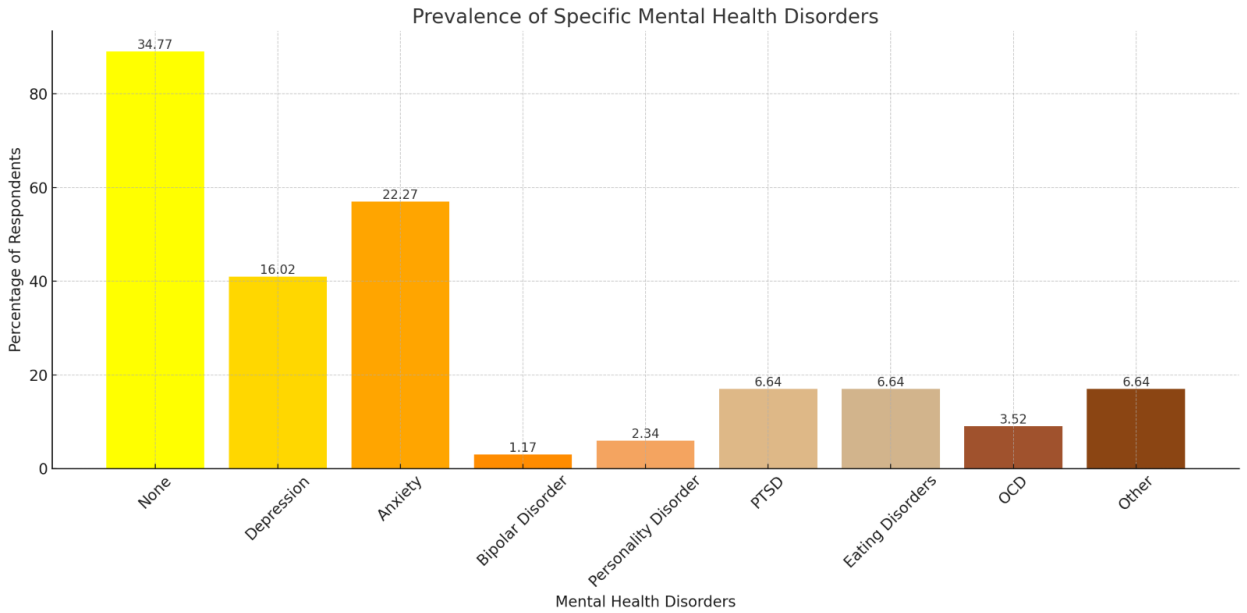
- **Physical and Professional Help are Significant:** Activities like exercise and seeking professional therapy are also notable, indicating an awareness of the benefits of physical health on mental well-being and the value of professional guidance.
- **Concerns Over Self-medication:** The reliance on self-medication by nearly 30% of respondents raises concerns about the accessibility and adequacy of mental health resources.

Effectiveness of coping mechanism used by survey respondents

- Most respondents find their coping strategies to be beneficial, with a significant majority reporting them as at least somewhat effective. This suggests a positive impact on their mental health, although continuous support and resources are necessary to enhance these outcomes.

The data portrays a group actively engaged in managing their mental health through a blend of community-supported, personal, and professional strategies. However, it also underscores the need for better access to mental health services that are culturally sensitive and readily available to prevent the need for less advisable coping methods like self-medication. This story not only reflects their struggles but also their strong agency in seeking health and well-being.

- **<u>Health Diagnoses:</u>** Details the prevalence of specific mental health disorders within the surveyed group.



- The most common diagnoses were anxiety and depression, affecting around one-third and one-fourth of the respondents, respectively.

- A smaller percentage reported other mental health disorders such as PTSD, eating disorders, personality disorders, and OCD.
- The variety of mental health disorders reported highlights the diverse nature of mental health challenges within the surveyed population.

The survey data on mental health diagnoses among Black female youth in Canada paints a nuanced story that extends beyond the statistics, highlighting significant themes of underdiagnosis and the pervasive influence of stigma in shaping access to mental health care.

Insights drawn from survey findings on health diagnosis.

- **High Proportion Reporting No Diagnoses:** A considerable 50.86% of respondents indicated they have not been diagnosed with any mental health disorders. This striking statistic likely points to more than the absence of mental health issues; it hints at underdiagnosis, where barriers such as stigma, limited access to mental health resources, or cultural reluctance to seek professional help prevent individuals from obtaining necessary care.
- **Common Mental Health Issues:** Anxiety and depression emerge as the most frequently diagnosed conditions, affecting a significant portion of respondents. These disorders are well-recognized and often the focal point of mental health discussions, which might influence their higher diagnosis rates.
- **Diverse Challenges:** Other conditions like PTSD, eating disorders, and OCD, each reported by about 10% of the participants, reflect a broader spectrum of mental health challenges. These too are critical but may not receive the same level of attention or understanding, potentially due to stigma or a lack of awareness.

Understanding the Impact: Beyond the Statistics

- **Stigma as a Barrier:** The stigma associated with mental health diagnoses can be a formidable barrier, especially in communities where mental health issues are not openly discussed or where there is a strong cultural emphasis on coping independently. Fear of social ostracism can lead individuals to endure symptoms without seeking help, thereby increasing the likelihood of underdiagnosis.
- **Cultural and Social Factors Impacting Health Seeking Behaviors:** Cultural perceptions play a crucial role in the approach to mental health. In some communities, traditional beliefs about mental health may lead to a preference for spiritual or community-based solutions over medical intervention, impacting the diagnosis rates.
- **Need for Culturally Sensitive Approaches:** The diversity of the conditions reported underscores the need for mental health services that are culturally sensitive and inclusive, capable of addressing the wide-ranging needs of Black female youth.

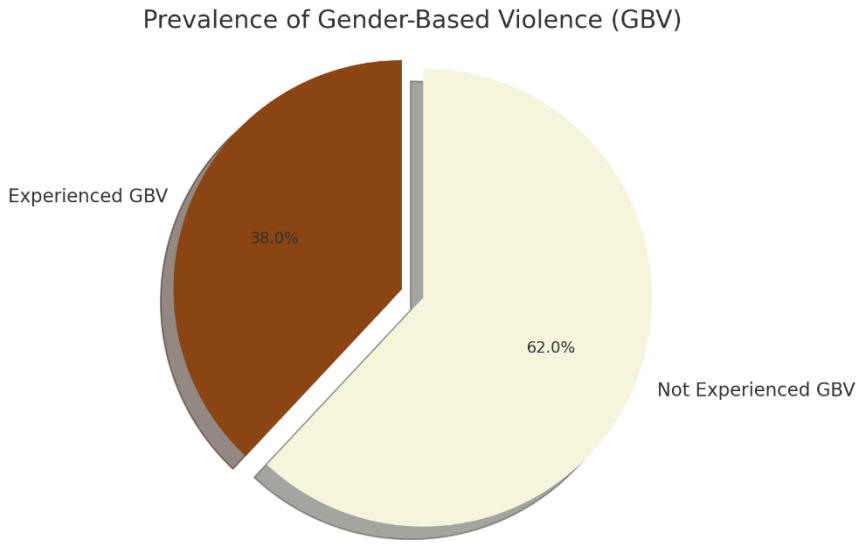
The data reveals a complex interplay of individual, cultural, and systemic factors that affect mental health diagnosis among Black female youth in Canada. It emphasizes the importance of addressing stigma and improving access to mental health services. Efforts to enhance mental health awareness and culturally appropriate care are essential to ensure that all individuals can

seek and receive the support they need, fostering a healthier, more understanding community environment.

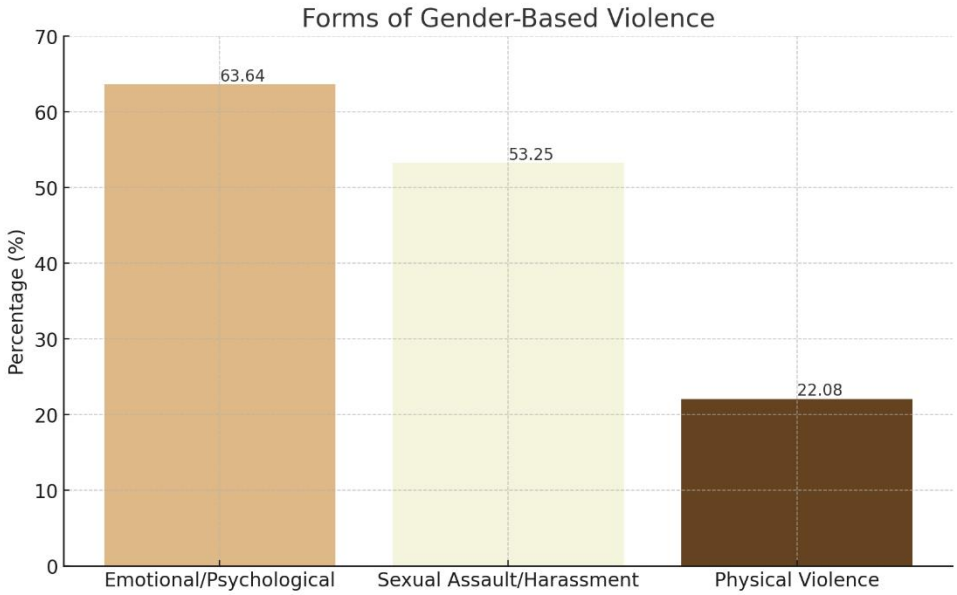
- **<u>Gender Based Violence (GBV): Details the occurence of GBV in the surveyed group</u>**

Prevalence of GBV:

- 38.01% of respondents reported experiencing gender-based violence (GBV) or intimate partner violence.

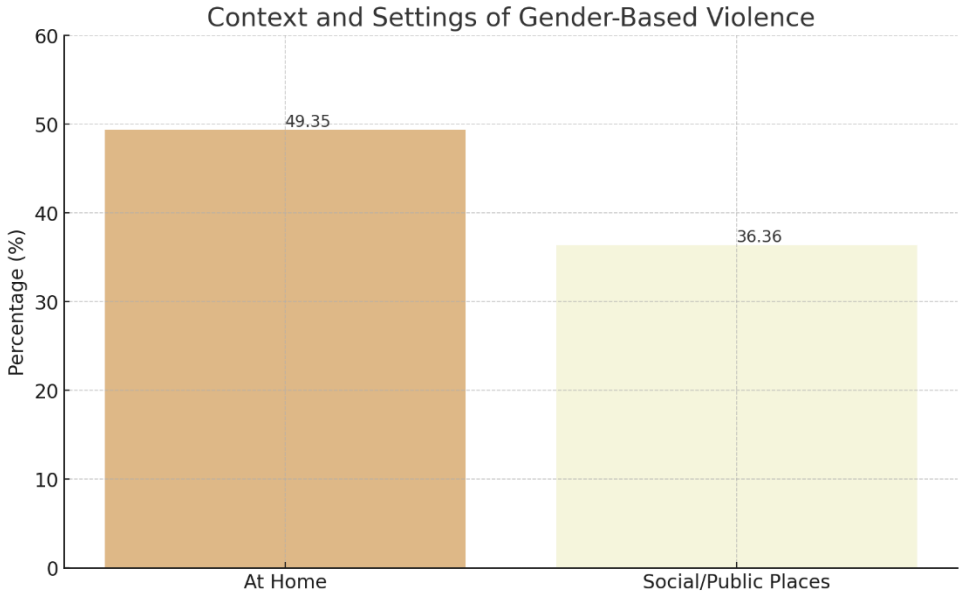


- Forms of GBV included emotional or psychological abuse (63.64%), sexual assault or harassment (53.25%), and physical violence (22.08%).



Context and Settings:

- *GBV primarily occurred at home (49.35%) and in social/public places (36.36%).*



- Partners or boyfriends were significant perpetrators (29.49%).

Help-Seeking Behavior:

- 76.54% of those experiencing GBV refrained from seeking help.

Insights drawn from the survey respondents about GBV

- Demonstrates the multifaceted nature of GBV and its prevalence within intimate relationships and community spaces.
- Highlights barriers to accessing support services.
- Most of the gender-based violence instances occur within familiar environments, notably at home and in social or public places. Also, partners or boyfriends are identified as significant perpetrators, accounting for many reported cases. This highlights the importance of addressing GBV within intimate and familiar relationships and community spaces.
- Despite the prevalence of gender-based violence, many respondents refrained from seeking help or support. This reluctance to seek assistance underscores the barriers individuals face in accessing resources and support systems, which could be due to factors such as stigma, fear, or lack of awareness about available services.
- Overall, these survey findings emphasize the urgent need for comprehensive strategies to address gender-based violence, including raising awareness, providing accessible support services, and fostering a culture of empathy and accountability in both private and public spheres.

Implications for Action

- Shift Societal Attitudes: Combat victim blaming by promoting accountability for perpetrators to shift societal views.
- Create Safe Spaces: Develop environments that encourage open discussions and address the shame associated with GBV.
- Challenge Norms: Actively challenge cultural and social norms that perpetuate GBV.
- Enhance Education and Awareness: Expand campaigns to deepen the understanding of GBV, recognizing its signs, and promoting healthy relationships.
- Improve Support Service Accessibility: Broaden and publicize the availability of support services, including mobile and online options.
- Safe Reporting Mechanisms: Implement safe, confidential reporting channels that ensure victim privacy and autonomy.
- Culturally Sensitive Interventions: Provide culturally appropriate services that cater to the diverse backgrounds of those affected.
- Address Stigma and Fear: Launch initiatives aimed at reducing stigma and encouraging victims to report incidents of GBV.
- Community Engagement: Engage community leaders and the public in efforts to eradicate GBV.
- Foster Accountability: Encourage accountability in both private and public sectors to prevent GBV and support victims.
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Thoughts of Suicide or Suicidal Ideation:

- Yes: 55.03% (93 respondents)
- No: 44.97% (76 respondents)
- Total Respondents: 169
- Skipped: 82

Attempted Suicide:

Yes: 22.67% (34 respondents)
No: 77.33% (116 respondents)
Total Respondents: 150
Skipped: 101

Seeking Help or Support for Suicidal Thoughts or Attempts (Applicable to "Yes" Responses in Both Previous Questions):

Yes: 23.78% (34 respondents)
No: 18.88% (27 respondents)
Not applicable: 57.34% (82 respondents)
Total Respondents: 143
Skipped: 108

The findings highlight the prevalence of suicidal thoughts among the respondents and the varying levels of support-seeking behaviors. It underscores the importance of creating awareness about mental health resources and support services.

The data on suicide ideation among Black female youth in Canada reveals urgent mental health challenges and significant gaps in support systems.

Key Insights Drawn from Thoughts of Suicide Ideation:

- **Widespread Suicidal Ideation:** Over half (55.03%) of respondents report experiencing thoughts of suicide, indicating a profound level of mental distress and the need for urgent intervention.
- **Substantial Suicide Attempts:** Nearly one in four respondents (22.67%) has attempted suicide, significantly higher than the general population, highlighting vulnerabilities in this demographic.
- **Low Help-Seeking Behavior:** Only 23.78% of those experiencing suicidal thoughts or attempts sought help, suggesting barriers such as stigma, lack of trust in available services, or unawareness of support options.

Implications for Action:

- **Enhance Education and Awareness:** Increase awareness about mental health and the importance of seeking help through community and educational programs.
- **Provide Culturally Sensitive Services:** Develop and promote access to mental health services that are culturally responsive and accessible.
- **Strengthen Community Support:** Encourage community-based support networks that offer immediate and culturally relevant help.
- **Influence Policy for Better Support:** Inform policymakers to allocate resources effectively and create supportive mental health legislation.

These findings underscore the need for comprehensive strategies to address mental health crises and improve the support infrastructure for Black female youth, promoting a societal shift towards better mental health understanding and support.

- **Substance Use**
  - A variety of substances, including marijuana, alcohol, and prescription medication, were reported to be used more than once.
  - A significant percentage engaged in self-medicating behavior (19.50%).
  - The frequency of self-medication varied, with a notable portion reporting occasional or rare use.
  - Respondents expressed mixed opinions on the impact of substance use on mental health and overall well-being, with a substantial portion indicating no noticeable difference.
  - A minority discussed their substance use practices with a mental health professional or therapist (16.99%).

The survey data on substance use among Black female youth in Canada reveals a complex landscape of how these individuals interact with various substances, highlighting key issues such as self-medication and its varied impacts on their lives.

Insights Drawn from Surveyed Respondents Substance Use:

- **High Usage Rates:** A significant majority of respondents reported using alcohol (73.33%) and marijuana (68.89%), reflecting their prevalent role in the lives of these youths. The use of prescription medications and other substances like magic mushrooms and cocaine, though less common, indicates a range of substances being accessed for various reasons.
- **Self-Medication:** Nearly one-fifth (19.50%) of the youth engage in self-medicating behaviors, using substances to cope with mental health challenges. This suggests that without accessible mental health services, or due to stigma associated with seeking such help, substances become an alternative relief.

Impacts of Substance Use:

- **Mixed Effects on Well-being:** The effects of substance use are mixed and varied; some users perceive improvements in their mental health, while others experience deterioration, highlighting the double-edged nature of self-medication. Significant impacts on physical health, relationships, productivity, and finances were also noted, though nearly 40% of respondents reported no noticeable changes.
- **Underutilized Professional Support:** Despite these varied impacts, only a small fraction (16.99%) has discussed their substance use with mental health professionals, indicating a disconnect or potential barriers in communication between young women and healthcare providers.

Conclusive Narrative: This profile of substance use among Black female youth underscores the critical need for comprehensive mental health and substance use education and services tailored to their unique experiences and challenges. It calls for a proactive approach to integrate discussions of substance use into mental health care and to reduce barriers to accessing these services, ensuring that young women can discuss and manage their substance use in safe and supportive environments.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Enhancing Mental Health Support

1. Increase Mental Health Education: Implement comprehensive education programs within schools, workplaces, and community centers to elevate awareness, diminish stigma, and cultivate supportive environments. These initiatives should educate participants on the nuances of mental health challenges and the critical importance of seeking professional help.

2. Expand Access to Culturally Competent Care: Support the development of mental health services that are culturally sensitive, advocating for the recruitment and ongoing training of Black

mental health professionals. This approach aims to provide relatable and effective care tailored to the community's specific needs.

3. Promote Community and Family Engagement: Develop programs that engage families and the broader community in mental health discussions, emphasizing the pivotal role of support and understanding in improving mental health outcomes. Family-oriented programs should focus on educating relatives about mental health, thus enhancing the support provided to individuals facing mental challenges.

4. Strengthen Support Networks: Construct robust support networks that offer diverse coping mechanisms, including creative outlets, spiritual activities, and physical exercises, specifically designed to appeal to young Black women. These networks should facilitate easy access to a variety of resources that assist in managing mental health.

5. Facilitate Access to Professional Help: Ensure that mental health services are both accessible and affordable. Encourage open dialogues between healthcare providers and patients about all facets of mental health, including discussions on substance use and its impacts.

6. Intensify Educational and Policy Advocacy: Prioritize the development and implementation of educational initiatives aimed at transforming perceptions of mental health within the Black community. Simultaneously, advocate for policies that address systemic barriers contributing to mental health stigma and inequality within healthcare systems.

7. Address Participant Discomfort: The significant number of skipped responses in the survey indicates a potential discomfort or uncertainty among participants when discussing mental health. This observation underscores the necessity to normalize mental health discussions in secure and supportive settings, making it easier for individuals to express their concerns and seek help.

These focused recommendations advocate for a comprehensive approach to improving mental health support, emphasizing education, accessibility, and cultural competence. By implementing these strategies, we aim to foster a more inclusive and equitable mental health system that adequately supports the unique needs of young Black women, ultimately enhancing overall community well-being.

Conclusion

The Udada Project stands as a crucial step toward bridging the gap in mental health support for Black girls and women in Canada. The comprehensive data gathered through the Udada National Survey has illuminated the specific needs and challenges faced by this demographic, providing a foundation for tailored interventions and support systems.

By focusing on culturally responsive care, the project not only addresses immediate mental health needs but also fosters long-term resilience and empowerment among Black female youth. The establishment of a virtual mental health platform, along with targeted training programs, ensures that both the recipients and providers of mental health services are well-equipped to handle the unique challenges presented.

Moreover, the insights from the survey highlight the importance of a decentralized support system to cater to the varied provincial demographics and the necessity for inclusive policy-making that takes into account the diverse experiences of discrimination and mental health challenges.

Moving forward, the Udada Project aims to continue its efforts in raising awareness, enhancing access to mental health services, and building a robust support network that persists over time. The recommendations provided call for comprehensive strategies to improve mental health support, emphasizing education, accessibility, and cultural competence.

By implementing these strategies, Future Black Female is committed to fostering a more inclusive and equitable mental health system, ultimately enhancing the well-being and resilience of Black girls and women across Canada.