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Prevalence of Mental Health Disorder Symptoms and Rates of Help-seeking Among University-Enrolled, Black Men



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Introduction

Recent studies show that Black men in college are disproportionately experiencing high levels of psychological distress, increasing their risk of developing mental health disorders (MHDs). We also see in the literature that:

- University-enrolled, Black men are not seeking care even when experiencing high levels of stress and anxiety.
- Mental health research and the evidence base describing MHD prevalence among Black men in college and their rates of help-seeking are limited.
- Of studies focusing on college students, many are underpowered to analyze by both race and gender simultaneously.

Aim and Research Questions

Aim: To examine the prevalence of MHD symptoms and rates of health services utilization among Black men and how these rates compare to Black women and White men.

- **RQ_{1/2}:** Are university-enrolled, Black men experiencing anxiety and depressive symptoms? Do these rates of symptoms differ from those reported by White men and Black women?
- **RQ_{3/4}:** Are university-enrolled, Black men who are experiencing anxiety and depressive symptoms utilizing health services? Do these rates differ from those reported by White men and Black women?

Methods

Overview of Dataset: We analyzed data (N ~ 2500) from a student survey, Spit for Science, a longitudinal, ongoing, research study at a mid-Atlantic, public university. Participants were ages 18 or older and received an initial survey in the first semester, followed by a follow-up survey every Spring.

Measures:

- **Symptom Checklist-90 (SCL-90)** included subscales, 4 items each, for measuring depressive ($\alpha = 0.89$) and anxiety ($\alpha = 0.85$) symptoms. Sum scores were created. Higher scores mean higher endorsement of one or more anxiety or depressive symptom.
- **Campus service utilization** included a series of yes and no questions asking whether students used University Counseling Services, University Health Services, The Wellness Resource Center (The Well) and Recreational Sports while at college.

Data Analysis: We conducted descriptive analyses to determine MHD symptom prevalence and utilization rates; Mann Whitney U tests were used to compare MHD rates between groups; and Chi-squared tests were used to compare rates of utilization.

Results

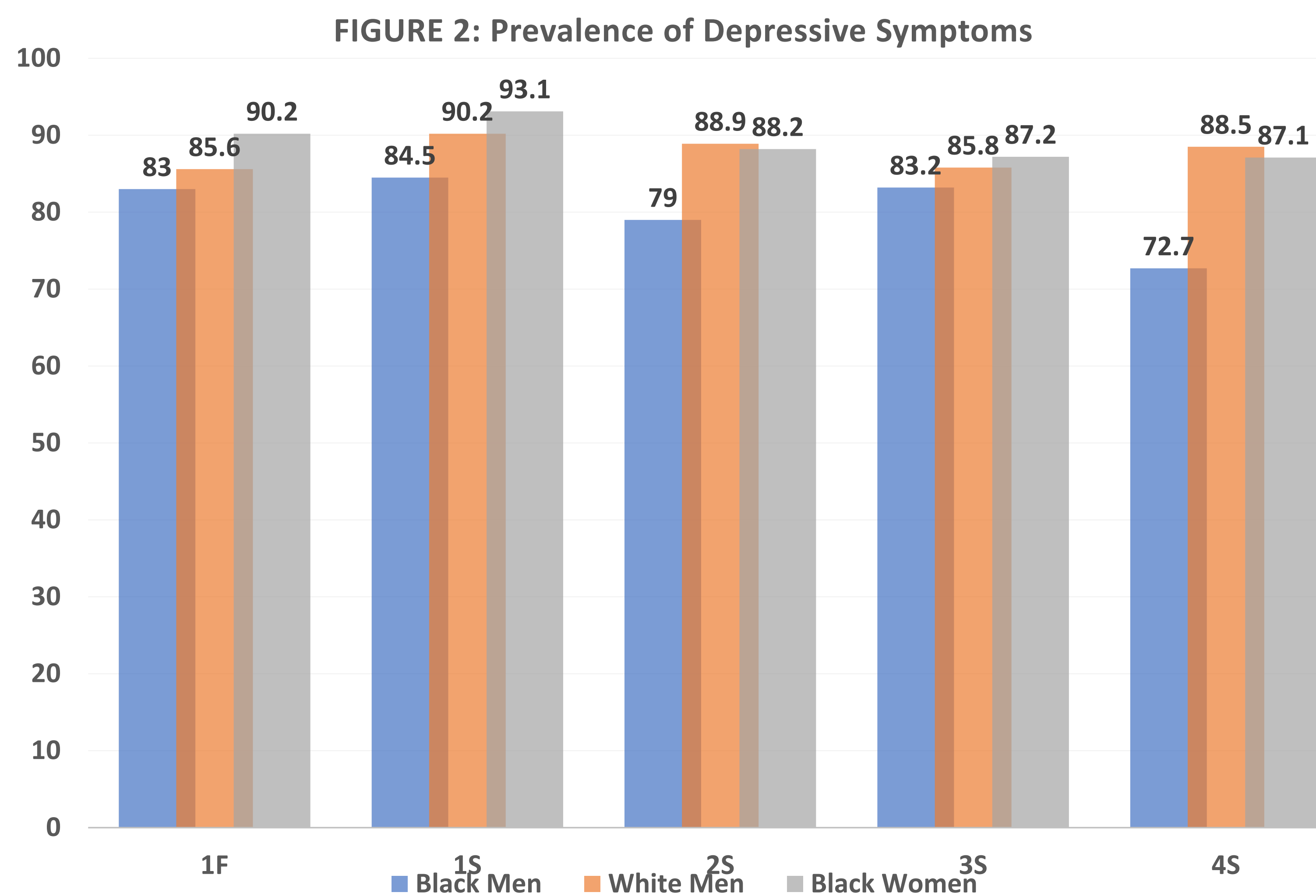
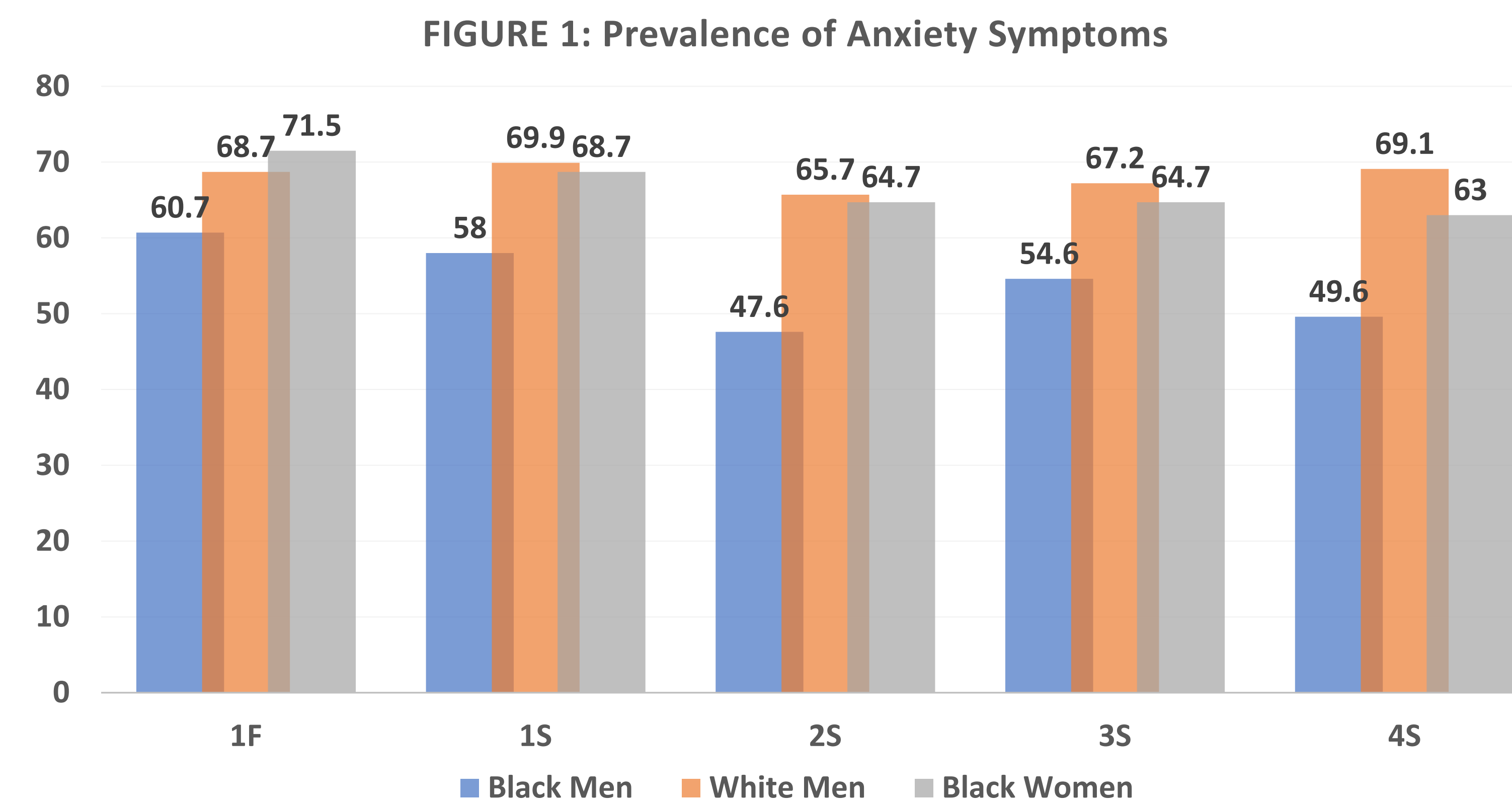


Table 1: Comparison of MHD Symptomology of Black Men to White Men and Black Women*

Year	Black Men (Mdn)	White Men (Mdn)	U	Z	P-value	Black Women (Mdn)	U	Z	P-value
Anxiety									
1F	6	6	23923	-0.368	0.713	7	10506.5	-4.003	<0.000
1S	5.5	7	9903.5	-5.305	<0.000	7	8840	-4.9	<0.000
2S	4.5	6	2064.5	-4.931	<0.000	6	3486	-3.193	0.001
3S	5.5	8	757	-5.645	<0.000	6	1981	-3.148	0.002
4S	4	7	562.5	-3.819	<0.000	7	792.5	-3.941	<0.000
Depression									
1F	9	9	25003	-0.346	0.729	10	14458.5	-2.476	0.013
1S	9	11	10359	-7.717	<0.000	11	9327	-7.45	<0.000
2S	9	11	2946	-6.037	<0.000	11	3015	-5.837	<0.000
3S	9	11	2946	-6.037	<0.000	11	3015	-5.837	<0.000
4S	9	10	1318.5	-1.42	0.156	11.5	913	-3.585	<0.000

*1F = Freshman Year Fall; 1S = Freshman Year Spring; 2S = Sophomore Year Spring; 3S = Junior Year Spring; 4S = Senior Year Spring

Participants: The overall analytic sample included 681 Black men, 2329 White men and 1679 Black women with approximately 75% Black men, 79% White men and 78% Black women having completed the SCL-90 Survey.

- **Mann Whitney U Tests** (see Table 1) showed that, overall, through all years, MHD prevalence rates among Black men were lower than their peers.
- **Chi-Squared Tests:** This included group differences among those who used a service and who reported endorsement of symptoms at or above the 75th percentile (see below).

Utilization for those with High Level Anxiety Symptoms

- **Year 1:** Black men (20.4%) utilized counseling services less than White men (37.76%), $p = 0.024$. White men (N = 60) utilized recreational sports more than Black men (N = 31), $p < 0.000$ and Black men (63.3%) utilized recreational sports more than Black women (42.7%), $p = 0.011$.
- **Year 2:** Black women (33.1%) used The Well more than Black men (10.5%), $p = 0.047$.
- **Year 3:** Black men used health services less than Black women (81.9%), $p = 0.002$.
- **Year 4:** Black men (66.7%) used health services less than Black women (86.4%), $p = 0.022$. Black men (74.1%) also showed higher rate of recreational sports utilization compared to White men (50.8%), $p = 0.042$.

Utilization for those with High Level Depressive Symptoms

- **Year 1:** Black men (63.3%) used recreational sports more than White men (37.6%), $p < 0.000$, as well as compared to Black women (34.1%), $p < 0.000$.
- **Year 3:** Black women (79%) used health services more than Black men (59.3%), $p = 0.034$.
- **Year 4:** Black men (68.4%) used health services lower than Black women (92.8%), $p = 0.011$.

Conclusions

Discussion: Compared to their male and female counterparts, Black men underutilized available campus counseling and health services despite reporting one or more symptoms associated with anxiety and depression.

- **Limitations:** Sample size and attrition are limitations of this study. As presented, each group, African American men being the smallest, show a high response rate in Year 1; however, by senior year, size decreases. Another limitation lies in the focus of three ethnic groups, limiting the generalizability of the results. However, this study's focus on a severely marginalized population contributes greatly to current mental health literature.
- **Future Directions:** Future work should aim to conduct similar analyses, examining prevalence of symptoms and help-seeking among emerging adult, Black men, including those from varying universities and campuses, cultures and backgrounds.

Contact Information

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