

APRIL 2021

# BLACK MENTAL HEALTH LIVE

## UNMUTED

Post Event Report

PRESENTED BY



**NHS**

Sheffield Health and  
Social Care  
NHS Foundation Trust

# EVENT BACKGROUND

## Race inequalities and mental health

ADIRA, Sheffield Health and Social Care Trust & Sheffield Flourish have been working together to put on a series of events looking at Black experiences of mental health. The first event explored Black mental health through four key themes of 'lived experience'; 'getting help', 'understanding your rights' and 'Careers in Mental Health'. The event video is available to watch on the [Black Mental Health Live website](#) and has an accompanying report responding to the questions and key themes that came out of the discussions – so check it out, if you haven't already - <https://sheffieldflourish.co.uk/news/black-mental-health-live-post-event-report>.

#BMH Unmuted was the second instalment under the Black Mental Health Live banner. This report provides an overview of the key themes that came out of the discussions with the speakers and follow-up questions and comments from the audience, via social media.



**YOUR VOICE MATTERS AND SO DO YOU**

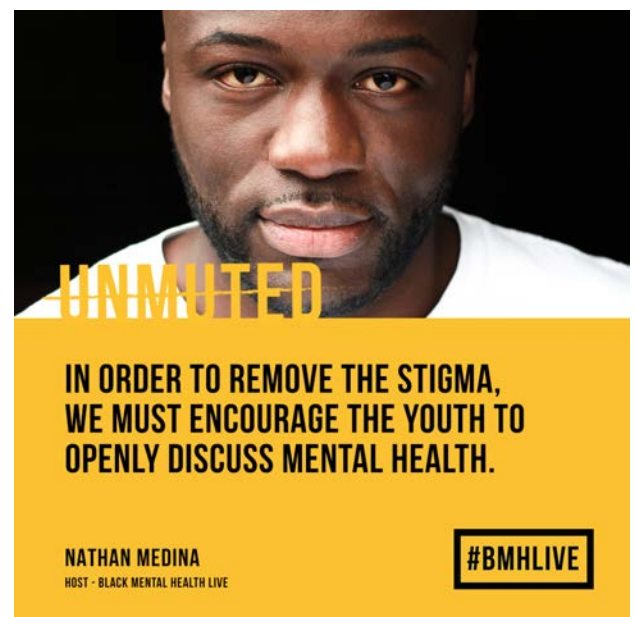
**#BMHLive**

# EVENT BACKGROUND

## Unmuted

#BMH Unmuted was the second instalment under the Black Mental Health Live banner and shined a spotlight on the mental health experiences of young Black people – often ignored, overlooked or drowned out; not only from within wider society but often from within the Black community itself. The event aimed to give young Black people from an African-Caribbean background a platform and a space to speak their truth. We are hopeful that in doing this, it encouraged and supported other young Black people to not only speak out and speak up but come forward to help.

We wanted to raise awareness of the issue, the causes and what we can do as adults to support mental health in young Black people and help them to bring about change in our community. We also wanted to learn more from the young Black people in our community about what they want and need from us, the adults and the mental health services, and how we can better work together to provide the care and support that's needed.



<http://blackmentalhealth.live/>

#BMHLive

# ENGAGEMENT



**UNMUTED**

MENTAL HEALTH IS IMPORTANT. WE ALL FACE IT. MORE ACTION NEEDS TO BE TAKEN TO REMOVE THE TABOO OF DISCUSSING IT OPENLY. THE MORE WE SPEAK THE MORE ACTION IS TAKEN

TARIQ #BMHLIVE




**UNMUTED**

THROUGH KNOWLEDGE, ACCEPTANCE AND LOVE OF SELF WE CAN UNMUTE A GENERATION AND CREATE CONFIDENT AND POWERFUL FUTURE LEADERS.

ZARA #BMHLIVE

4


young Black people sharing their stories and speaking their truth



**UNMUTED**

IT IS SAID THAT OVERCOMING ADVERSITY BUILDS STRENGTH. OVERCOMING ANYTHING REQUIRES ADDRESSING IT FIRST THOUGH. SO LET'S TALK. LESS DEBATE, MORE DIALOGUE.

NAOMI #BMHLIVE



**UNMUTED**

CONSIDERING ALL THE THINGS WE GO THROUGH AS A PEOPLE WE SHOULD BE EXTRA-CONCERNED ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH WITHIN OUR COMMUNITY.

ROSS  
AKA RA'SIAH #BMHLIVE

2147

views for the live event

6876

reach on social platforms

#BMHLive

# KEY THEMES

Through the discussions, questions and audience feedback, we identified 4 key themes:

Theme 1: Black trauma

Theme 2: Challenges with identity

Theme 3: Barriers within institutions

Theme 4: Generational differences

# THEME 1: BLACK TRAUMA

## How mental health is viewed within the Black community

"We have a different mentality towards mental health. In 2020, mental health was getting spoken about a lot but mental health problems have been an issue for a long, long time especially within the Black community. However, the generation previously, it was just taboo to speak about mental health. Where I'm from in Nigeria, if you say mental health, they just think you are 'crazy'."

"In first generation African homes, there is a weird soldier mentality of keep going, keep going and that can take a toll on someone. There is this sense that we have it all, so what do we have to be depressed about."

"I think people need to start listening more, especially within our own community, to what a child has to say. The elders should open up as well, because you guys have seen it and done it."

"How do we deal with mental health in the BME community? People that are in retirement that don't want to tell anyone that they are really feeling down, not able to fall asleep, brain fog, tired..."



"We expect our children to be the same as us. But that doesn't work for this generation. It is not helpful to tell you guys, when you come and say 'Mum, I'm struggling', 'Dad, I'm struggling' and we tell you to 'toughen up'."

# THEME 1: BLACK TRAUMA

## Demonisation as a Black community

"Black people have been demonised during the pandemic. People think it is our fault and accuse us of not social distancing properly, as an example the Black Lives Matter demonstrations. This pandemic will be over, but racial inequality won't."

"If we cannot critically look at all of ourselves, we can't really address the big issues that we would like to overcome. It's counterintuitive to talk about Black Lives Matter without acknowledging that all Black Lives Matter and not just the ones that are palatable to 'my mum'."



## A focus on the negatives of being Black

"As young Black people today, our mental health is important, but there are some things we can't change in the system. We therefore need to be more proactive with our mental health by going to events like this and creating safe spaces for people."

"In sixth form I was diagnosed with severe depression, but I was sceptical again. You go into a counselling session and they ask you "what's wrong", they ask you about the negative aspect, and it's not always about the negatives. You can have lows and you can have highs when it comes to mental health. Within the system, they look at it quite narrowly."

# THEME 1: BLACK TRAUMA

"When I walk into an interview for a job, they are not going to see me for all my talents, they are going to see a Black woman. They are not going to see us for our merits. It is very frightening having to deal with this mental pressure."

"We need to inspire our young people to embrace self-development and therapy to heal."

## A lack of understanding

"Just because you have been around people of colour, does not mean you suddenly have our world view. You do not have the internalised, however many years of oppression that your parents put on you, that you put on your other friends of colour by accident. So, as well meaning as you may be, please just listen, because you don't get. You try, and we appreciate that, but you can't 'get it' without being in it. Please just do your very best to listen."

"People are different. But that doesn't mean there isn't room for us to acknowledge and respect each other despite these differences. I can be talking to a conservative, white, fascist, lady-hating misogynist about bread types. We might like the exact same bread. I still don't have to agree with anything he says but I have to respect that he is a human being with opinions. Likewise, he should respect that I am a human being with opinions and have a right to equal treatment."

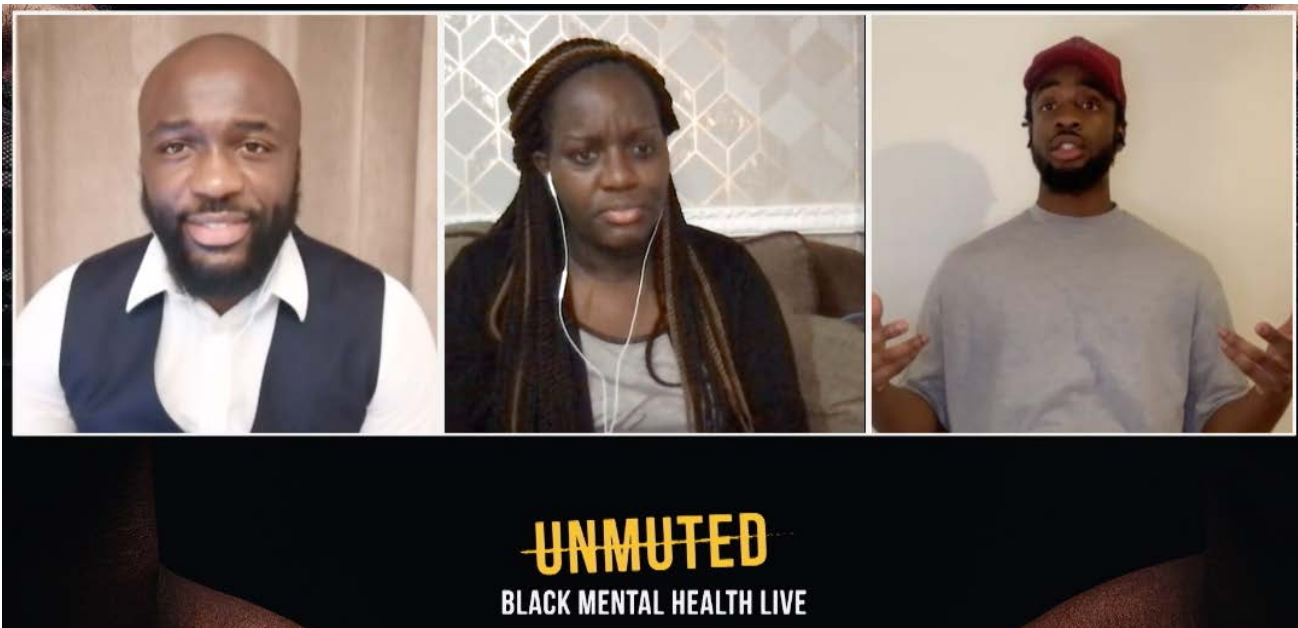




# THEME 2: CHALLENGES WITH IDENTITY

## Lack of Black role models

"I have seen one Black lecturer in an entire University, and it started making me think, am I going to be the one Black lecturer in the entire University or is someone else going to take my spot."



## Trying to be a 'good' Black person

"We need to stop trying to be 'good Black people'. We're trying to be the nice Black, the non-violent Black, the non-aggressive Black. You need to say what you want with your chest. If there is a problem, email the head of your department, you email the head of your University, you email the President of whatever and you get your voice heard. You need to not be scared of wanting to eat at their table. Stop trying to be nice."

# THEME 2: CHALLENGES WITH IDENTITY

## Gender

"We have a judgement that we get from the mainstream media, and we feel like we can't approach things in a certain way. Sometimes, I feel like people should just approach me in the way I actually am...I am still your son, I am still your brother, I am still your mate from back in the day, I am still just a man or a boy."

"When I look back, myself and my peers, we definitely could have benefitted from some help, within the community, within schools...looked at as something that should be dealt with, rather than just a 'problem'. That idea of a problem can then progress as you get older and you start to rebel a bit. Maybe that can account for some of the problems we have as young Black men. There are a lot of problems that manifest into terrible situations and they only look at it when it's happened and they don't look at how someone can get to that point."



## THEME 2: CHALLENGES WITH IDENTITY

### Sexuality

"My family don't hate gay people and are not actively homophobic, they are just of a cultural and spiritual mindset that it is a sin to be gay. They don't know that I am bi...my even being here and talking like this is a risk to my anonymity, but I'm a 25 year old grown woman, so at this point, if they find out – it is what it is."

"Being Black, we are already a minoritized group, and then to be bisexual, that is a minority within a minority; a subsection of a subsection of society."



"I think it would be easier for the more homophobic parts of the older generation to accept us if there was just more exposure. You should be able to drop into conversation the fact that your partner is a lady, or a male if you're male, without it being looked at oddly. The only time it is not going to be looked at oddly is if it is old news. Queer people are old news, we've been around for ages, it's just not palatable to society as it stands."

"To have to slice yourself up and only give a few of the slices to your family, who should love you unconditionally, it does hurt, frankly. So, there are mental health things that come up just by me being a bit queer."

# THEME 3: INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGES

## School

"Issue were always looked at as behavioural. I hear from within my own community that with young Black boys, ADD or ADHD is something that they go to quite quickly and they medicate you, and its actually a misdiagnosis in the end. You have to consider the cultural thing, it may just be that the way we are may not fit within the way the system wants us to learn. You may not have to sit down so much in another setting, you're allowed to move around a bit."



"The only reason I survived secondary school was because I had a Black counsellor. If everyone had a Black Counsellor like I did, I am telling you now, so many kids would be better off."

## University

"I am an African immigrant – do you know how long I have dreamt of University and how long I have worked towards getting to University. No one understands the pressures we have at home. As a Black student, we have parents at home who want us to be Doctors, to be Lawyers, to be Accountants... who need us to prove that all their sacrifices were worth it."

"Racism is well and truly alive within Universities than ever. What people don't understand is that going to University is still a very elitist thing. To be able to afford to go to University, to take that time out of your adult working life, you have to be privileged."

# THEME 3: INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGES

## Mental health support

"There's a presumption that because you are Black, you live on a rough estate or come from a single-parent family. You're almost judged before the counselling session begins, simply based on the colour of your skin."

"My last counsellor was quite sensitive to my identity and would make it known about cultural sensitivities. He was a god-send and you would hardly ever get that."

"What advice would I give to counsellors or therapists working with young Black men or women?"

Get rid of any assumptions or stereotypes you may have. Think, I am going to help them deal with their problems, but I am going to let them teach me about the cultural side. Sometimes you try and jump the gun on the cultural side and you end up messing up. I do it myself sometimes - let me deal with the person in front of me and they are going to tell me where they are coming from and who they are. You are then actually learning at the same time."



"Services aren't being marketed to young Black people and it's just that simple. As soon as you start marketing to young Black people that you are a safe organisation or a safe spot that we can go to, believe me we will go to you."

# THEME 4: GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES

## Social media

"The age is getting younger where there is "no going back" or harder to help them now, at this point. I see a lot of kids getting left to their own devices now, with their phones and laptops. We need to come together as a community and have a chat about our relationships without phones and laptops."

"The generations are facing different challenges. The older generation didn't face this thing we call social media. With social media there are a lot of different challenges that parents just don't understand at all."

"I feel like the previous generation thinks we are weak because we face different challenges. Our challenges are online, for example, if we are getting bullied online, the older generation would just say 'close your laptop' or 'get off your phone' but it is never really that simple."

"I don't really have a social media presence, but my sister does. One thing I am always encouraging her to do, is to use social media to build her 'real life', as social media is not real. However, it is challenging for her because the companies literally build social media platforms to get us addicted to it."



# THEME 4: GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES

## Relationship with the older generations

"You have to take a step back and realise that we are in a generation where things are changing very, very quickly. It is definitely down to the older generation to realise they don't understand this and need to take a step back and see what is actually going on."

"Mental health and Black students can be very difficult because most of the Black students I know, should not be at University.

By that I mean it is not their aim –

“I am studying accountancy”

“Do you want to be an accountant?”

“No not really, but my parents want me to.”



**ROSS AKA RA'SIAH**

The older generation need to realise that there are times when they need to just listen and not lecture. You can't fix everything, and you have to listen and let the person vent.

For the younger generation, it's about understanding that they have probably gone through 80% of what we're going through and have come out the other side. If you just sat down and listened to them from an objective place and tried to understand them, there will be a lot of issues that you thought you couldn't fix, but you can fix. They were once a young black person themselves.



ADIRA is a survivor-led mental health & well-being organisation - supporting Black people with mental health issues.

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[www.adira.org.uk](http://www.adira.org.uk)



Sheffield Health and Social Care NHS Foundation Trust provide a range of mental health, learning disability and substance misuse services to the people of Sheffield.

[www.shsc.nhs.uk](http://www.shsc.nhs.uk)



Sheffield Flourish are a mental health charity that support people to use their skills, ideas and talent to build the lives they want.

[info@sheffieldflourish.co.uk](mailto:info@sheffieldflourish.co.uk)

[www.sheffieldflourish.co.uk](http://www.sheffieldflourish.co.uk)

oXyFire Media Creative and Subversive Productions provided all technical support

<https://oxyfire.com/>

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