



COMMUNITY DISPLACEMENT AND ITS INFLUENCE ON MENTAL HEALTH


Historically, BIPOC populations have been pushed out of their living spaces intentionally and forcefully. Even if a BIPOC individual hasn't dealt with community displacement in their own lifetime, generational and historical trauma can still impact their current mental health and quality of life. Forced removal and relocation, [redlining](#) (the denial of services to residents of certain areas based on their race or ethnicity), urban renewal practices, and gentrification have all contributed to the erasure of BIPOC communities, their cultural values, languages, practices, and power.

Within each individual community, displacement has impacted overall wellness in a variety of ways. For example, on top of the genocide of Indigenous people in the United States, they also were stripped of their cultural and linguistic practices, forced to convert to foreign religions, and relocated to reservations. Due to the deep roots of colonialism in the U.S., to this day, Native Americans, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians continue to face immense challenges such as lack of access to resources, loss of cultural identity, environmental degradation, displacement from family systems, and high levels of violence.¹ Additionally, individuals of Indigenous communities that originated outside of the U.S. have faced similar barriers and forms of oppression that influence their abilities to thrive.

Community displacement disproportionately impacts all individuals within BIPOC communities, not just the individuals that are forced to move or those who have directly been affected by violence and oppressive practices. Gentrified neighborhoods increase the cost of living, lose small and local businesses, and disrupt community culture and safety. Community members impacted by gentrification face feelings of isolation, distrust in contributing systems such as their government or corporations and feel undervalued among other symptoms of psychological distress.²

Forced relocation and removal has distanced many BIPOC communities from their loved ones, cultural practices, languages, religious faith, and sense of identity. This generational trauma impacts the ability of BIPOC individuals to access services, feel secure, and have positive mental health outcomes. In lacking access to resources and services, individuals may be denied basic human rights such as clean water and healthy food.

To safeguard themselves from the impact of displacement, BIPOC communities have historically carved out spaces of support through cultural hubs, community gardens, community care systems, social clubs, and more. These culturally responsive spaces allow BIPOC individuals to feel connected with their communities, maintain physical and psychological safety, and gather together for times of joy and celebration. Cultural hubs often include restaurants that serve foods that may remind individuals of traditional family meals and practices, play music that helps individuals connect to past traditions, and offer opportunities to speak in a shared language. Community events may often include music, dancing, art, and other creative arts that are rooted in cultural traditions and practices. Furthermore, these cultural hubs serve as a point of entry for newly arrived individuals and a way to connect back to their culture.



BIPOC communities have also sought connection with one another and built sustainable systems of support through practices such as mutual aid, community health clinics, cooperative businesses, activism, cultural celebrations, and educational programs. For example, BIPOC communities have sustained culture and community through the following:

Mutual aid: Mutual aid is a form of community support where people pool their resources to help each other in times of need. BIPOC communities have a long history of practicing mutual aid, from sharing food and shelter during times of crisis to supporting each other financially.

Cooperative businesses: Cooperative businesses were created by BIPOC individuals to help support their own communities. These businesses are owned and operated by members of the community and are designed to provide goods and services that meet the specific needs of the community.

Community health clinics: Community health clinics often provide affordable health care to people who might otherwise not have access to it. These clinics are often community-led and staffed by people who have experience and expertise in providing culturally responsive care.

Advocacy and activism: BIPOC individuals have organized their communities to activate and advocate to counter the injustices often faced by, such as racial justice, police brutality, and environmental justice. community members

Cultural celebrations: To celebrate cultural heritage, BIPOC communities often host celebrations, such as festivals and parades, as a way of building community, promoting a sense of belonging, and reinforcing individual and community pride.

Educational programs: Educational programs developed by and for BIPOC communities provide skills and knowledge to succeed in a variety of areas. These can range from after-school programs for youth to job training and adult education.

Community gardens: BIPOC-established community gardens are a safety net for many individuals who may not have access to fresh produce. These gardens can also serve as a place for community members to gather and connect with one another and may provide skills training tied to cultural practices in working with the land.

SOURCES

¹Tran, L. D., Rice, T. H., Ong, P. M., Banerjee, S., Liou, J., & Ponce, N. A. (2020). Impact of gentrification on adult mental health. *Health services research, 55*(3), 432–444. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6773.13264>

²Sarache, M., & Spicer, P. (2008). Poverty and health disparities for American Indian and Alaska Native children: current knowledge and future prospects. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, 1136*, 126–136. <https://doi.org/10.1196/annals.1425.017>