

A New Hybrid Culture of Diverse Mental Health

All that Talk

The Global Pandemic has brought to the fore the essential need for a greater focus and investment in mental health and well-being, particularly in the work place. There has also been a lot of noise around Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI). A mass of commentaries has talked about how this is great for business, our eyes have been prised open to the long-standing abuse, racism and inequity faced by women and people from diverse backgrounds, as well as the lack of progress in meaningful DEI. These areas were looked at as separate life issues, when in fact factors related to DEI have a major impact on mental health.

A Dire History - Confronting Today's Harsh Reality

Increasing evidence reveals, that women and people from diverse groups / backgrounds face adverse societal factors, which are detrimental to their mental health & well-being. These factors, have been prevalent throughout history and stem from circumstances particularly related to: a person's; race, ethnicity, gender, physical or developmental ability, sexual orientation/ Identity, religion, class, economic status, age and others factors of diversity.

There are severe consequences, when women, individuals and groups, from diverse backgrounds are:

- Generationally affected by a brutal and non-transparent history
- From early childhood continually, fed negative messages about their identity and ability
- Barred or limited access to the same opportunities and resources, as those afforded to others
- Restricted, unfairly treated and punished through societal structures and systems
- Not afforded equal treatment in essentials such as; housing, jobs, education or medical care
- Face rejection, abuse, physical, psychological or verbal assault

When we recognise this, it becomes apparent, that these factors can contribute significantly to poor mental health and mental illness. We witness these aspects being played out in a person's lived experience every day.

Trauma - The Hard Hit

The severe damage inflicted by Racism, Sexism, Ableism, Homophobia, Transphobia, Islamophobia, Anti-Semitism and other isms, which express negative bias, discrimination, threats, abuse and mistreatment cannot be underestimated. This, along with the early and continual exposure to harmful experiences can lead to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or traumatic symptoms. You do not have to be directly involved in a traumatic experience, to be distressed, disturbed or harmed by it. Learning about and being witness to, as well as identifying with the experience, can also be detrimental to one's mental health and well-being. In better understanding this trauma, we are more able to adequately address people's needs, enabling healing and the development of healthier cultures.

Lack of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) - Counting the Losses

A Lack of DEI and its impact on mental health and well-being can lead to a wide range of negative consequences within the workplace. These can affect relationships, engagement, performance, productivity and contribute to a negative work culture. This can be seen in aspects such as;

- Lack of interest & engagement
- Poor communication & Lack of co-operation
- Lack of trust in leadership, management & between colleagues
- Higher possibility for conflicts & development of negative & dysfunctional work systems
- Dissatisfaction & lack of fulfilment
- Isolation, withdrawal and a strong sense of not belonging
- Higher rates of stress, anxiety, fear, uncertainty, anger frustration and insecurity
- Lack of innovation, change or growth
- Higher rates of sickness
- Higher turnover of employees

Building A New Culture of Diverse Mental Health

As a Black woman, having worked in the mental health and well-being field, for many years, the connection and similarities between our mental health and factors related to DEI have been crystal clear. These constitute a fundamental part of who we are and how we exist, as well as being vital in creating healthy and fulfilling human experiences. Many people feel uncomfortable and find these issues difficult to talk about, due to either the stigma, fear of being challenged, judged, penalised or being misunderstood.

It is essential to recognise, how mental health and DEI issues also relate to long-standing societal forces, which have harmed and hindered development. However, this is not all doom and gloom. When adequately addressed and supported these factors hugely benefit social, personal and business growth. Bringing together, understanding and effectively addressing the issues, which are related to mental health and DEI can assist in promoting healthier, as well as safer environments, engaged communities, productive systems and more inclusive work cultures.

In meeting the needs of the workplace and wider society, the coming together of mental health and DEI factors create a new hybrid culture of diverse mental health, where challenges can be more effectively addressed and mutual benefits can be reaped

If health services and businesses seriously seek to form a diverse workforce, which is healthy, productive, engaged and happy, then they need to understand and address the strong relationship between people's mental health and the status of equity, inclusion and diversity within their culture. This means fully supporting everyone, in considering the specific issues and impact of the problems related to trauma, inequity, exclusion, injustice and discrimination

Serving People and Profit

Cutting through all of the noise, criticism and grand proclamations, which have so far been made, it is important to recognise, the major benefits for a new hybrid culture of Diverse Mental Health. This development offers the possibility to:

- ✓ Create positive, mentally healthy, diverse and inclusive work places.
- ✓ Increase performance, productivity and profit.
- ✓ Build work cultures, which utilise diverse talent and increase retention.
- ✓ Enhance leadership potential.
- ✓ Improve the communication, engagement and relationships of both employees and customers.

Commitment to the mental health and well-being of women and a diverse workforce, requires strong and on-going mental health support structures incorporating effective DEI strategies. The foundation, which represents the soil of a culture, needs to be well nurtured, with care, conducive conditions and investment of relevant time and resources. A crucial factor, is without a doubt, psychologically safe environments, which are inclusive, non-judgemental and protective. This is essential for stability, productivity, growth, good health and happiness

Adequate Mental Wellbeing for all IS NOT POSSIBLE without Full, Effective and Meaningful Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

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<https://www.freechoices.co.uk/diverse-mental-health/>