

How Can Substance Use Treatment Interventions Better Prioritize and Meet the Needs of Black Youth Impacted by the Legal System?

The Public Health Problem

Black youth impacted by the legal system face multiple, compounding forms of anti-Black racism that make them susceptible to substance use, with downstream effects on educational outcomes, behavior problems, and depressive symptoms.

To date, no known adolescent substance use treatment directly addresses the impacts of anti-Black racism, racial trauma, or distress stemming from discriminatory experiences.

Background

Evidence-based psychosocial interventions for adolescent substance use treatment already exist. Motivational Enhancement Therapy and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (MET/CBT12) is a 12-week behavioral treatment program primarily designed to help adolescents overcome marijuana and alcohol use disorders.

The Cultural Adaptation of Substance Use Treatment (CAST) project builds on this foundation by culturally adapting MET/CBT12 to better amplify the voices of Black youth, Black parents, and Black community members.

What This Article Addresses

This study explores how CAST challenges traditional top-down approaches to treatment development by advocating for a grassroots model that centers community knowledge, values, and active participation throughout the adaptation and implementation process.

CAST uses cultural adaptation, refinement, and piloting of the Cannabis Youth Treatment program for Black youth, and is guided by an eight-step process called Assess, Decision, Adaptation, Production, Topical Expert, Integration, Training, Testing (ADAPT-ITT).

What They're Doing *(Methods)*

This paper outlines the CAST project's protocol for culturally adapting the MET/CBT12 intervention from the Cannabis Youth Treatment program. Using the eight-step ADAPT-ITT framework, the study incorporates input from Black youth, parents, and community members to guide adaptations. Then it tests the revised intervention in an open pilot trial for feasibility, acceptability, and early signals of impact on treatment engagement, substance use, and discrimination distress.

Opportunities for Action

The paper highlights opportunities for:

Health care leaders & providers

- Use these findings to guide culturally responsive adaptation of evidence-based substance use treatments.
- Incorporate community-informed adaptations into clinical practice, strengthen partnerships, and train providers.

Policymakers & payors

- Encourage collaboration between behavioral health and juvenile justice systems, and reduce barriers to treatment access.
- Incentivize reimbursement for culturally tailored, community-engaged services.

Researchers

- Measure implementation outcomes more consistently and comprehensively in substance use disorder research.
- Incorporate measures to determine whether beneficial implementation outcomes are achieved across populations.

Patients & families

- Share experiences, preferences, and cultural perspectives to help ensure interventions are relevant and responsive.
- Advocate for fair access to culturally responsive services.