

Dealing with callers' racialised talk in suicide preventive helplines: Accomplishing (anti)racism in the context of unconditional support

10. Public Health and community interventions

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Abstract text

This article investigates how mental health counsellors on helplines in Sweden deal with racism from callers who self-categorise as non-racialised. Previous studies have identified racism as a problem in health care interactions, but there is limited knowledge about the features of racialised talk and how staff respond. In this study, we use conversation analysis and membership categorisation analysis to examine racialised talk in 17 audiorecorded calls, a subset of 458 calls to suicide preventive helplines. The analysis shows that racialisation functions as a resource for callers to make sense of their mental health difficulties. This speaks to the complexity of responding to racism in a mental health setting, as counsellors must see to callers' needs, and calling out racialised talk may alienate callers. Call-takers manage this problem in three ways: (1) questioning racialised talk, (2) supporting the callers' stance in a way that makes it ambiguous if call-takers are coproducing racism or affiliating with callers' lives being difficult and (3) supporting callers' problems as mental health issues while resisting a potentially racist trajectory. The study offers direct insight into the workings of racism in health care and how practitioners can balance health care users' needs for support with an antiracist position.