



Advancing the Africentric Paradigm Shift

Discourse: Building Towards Evidence-Based

Africentric Intervention in Social Work Practice

“Africentric interventions are culturally congruent practices specifically for African American populations and have demonstrated significant positive outcomes across several areas important to social work practice with African Americans, including increases in positive child, adolescent and family development” (p. 244).

1. What is the research about?

Africentrism is an alternative holistic perspective that emerged in response to the failure of traditional approaches to consider Black experiences of collective disenfranchisement and historical trauma. Africentric interventions aim to mitigate historical trauma by implementing culturally congruent African value systems that have been cultivated through historical strengths. Evidence suggests that these interventions can counter oppressive conditions, reduce substance use and HIV rates, and contribute to a healthy cultural identity.

The purpose of this study is to build, document, and disseminate **current and emerging Africentric best practices** in order to integrate Africentric interventions into social work practice. This research examines programs that have demonstrated significant positive outcomes across several areas, including child, adolescent, and family development.

2. Where did the research take place?

Researchers drew on data from various programs in the United States.

3. Who is this research about?

This study is about African American youth and adults.

4. How was the research done?

The authors performed a systematic review of interventions grounded in Africentric principles across social work, psychology, and affiliated professional disciplines over the past decade. A **systematic review** is the process of identifying, selecting, and critically appraising all relevant data in order to provide a complete, exhaustive summary of current evidence. Programs were identified through five methods:

- i) Computer searches of over 15 different electronic databases;
- ii) Manual searches for studies reported from 1997 through 2007 in major journals and journals focusing on African American issues;
- iii) Examination of the bibliographies of selected articles;
- iv) Website searches across a number of National Institutes of Health; and
- v) Contact with individual Africentric scholars and institutions.

These programs supported African Americans and Africans within the context of historical and current oppression, and ranged from small, community-based programs to large-scale, multisite studies. The authors selected eight programs as a representative sample of Africentric interventions based on their objectives, outcomes, and methods of evaluation. These programs supported child, adolescent, and family development, and promoted protective factors related to substance use and HIV prevention.

5. What are the key findings?

Africentric programs use various African value systems, such as Nguzo Saba and Maat, to promote protective factors in children and youth.

Nguzo Saba is a value system that comprises seven guiding principles:

- i) **Unity** (striving for unity in family, community, and race)
- ii) **Self-determination** (defining, naming, and creating for oneself)
- iii) **Collection work and responsibility** (building and maintaining community and solving problems together)
- iv) **Cooperative economics** (building and maintaining the economic base of the community)
- v) **Purpose** (restoring people to their original traditional greatness)
- vi) **Creativity** (enhancing the beauty and benefits of self and community)
- vii) **Faith** (belief in the righteousness of the Black struggle)

Maat is an ancient Egyptian, strength-based, family-centered approach based on the expression of one's philosophical, spiritual, and cultural values.

The principles of Maat and Nguzo Saba support individuals, families, and communities in **developing spiritualism, interdependence, and transformative behaviour** through a connection to self and to the spiritual and material realms of being. These systems encourage behaviour change, raise sociopolitical consciousness, and empower communities to reaffirm their purpose and meaning in life.

By instilling values such as communalism and spirituality, Africentric programs **increase resiliency and other protective factors while decreasing or mediating risk factors**. They emphasize the current conditions of African Americans to help reduce societal pressures and build positive African American ideals. These programs may also include activities and projects that increase a positive sense of self through African and African American historical examples.

The eight programs included in this study saw a variety of **positive outcomes**, including:

- Increases in racial/ethnic identity, cultural values, and beliefs;
- Increased knowledge of African culture, such as rites of passage;
- Improved self-esteem, self-worth, motivation, and resilience;
- Improved school behaviour;
- Decreases in high-risk substance use and high-risk sexual behaviours;
- Improved knowledge of HIV/AIDS and substance use; and
- Decreased levels of depression.

6. Why does it matter for youth work?

The findings support the efficacy of **infusing Africentric values and an African-centered approach in programs** that target the healthy development of African American children and adults. Since youth workers are on the frontlines of working with clients who experience social, mental, and physical health disparities, they are in the best position to create better awareness and advocacy at local, state, and national levels.

Organizations can better serve Black youth by **integrating alternative holistic perspectives** that consider Black experiences of collective disenfranchisement and historical trauma. This study suggests that Africentric interventions can promote the wellbeing of Black youth by addressing structural and individual challenges.



Gilbert, D., Harvey, A., & Belgrave, F. (2009). Advancing the Africentric paradigm shift discourse: Building toward evidence-based Africentric interventions in social work practice with African Americans. *Social Work, 54*(3), 243–252.