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# Mental Health Stigma and Help Finding Services in the African American Community

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## Who Are They ?

- African American
- Afro-Caribbean
- African
  
- Experiences similar and histories are distinct
- Focus is on African Americans

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## Why Is This Important ?

Suicide is the third leading cause of death among African American males, ages 15-24, behind homicides and accidents.

The suicide rate among African American children, ages 10--14 increased 233% from 1980-1995.

Compared to the general population, African Americans are more likely to stop treatment early and less likely to receive follow up care.

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## Why Is This Important ?

Despite similar rates of mental illness across ethnic groups, only 27% of African Americans receive treatment (compared with 44% Whites, and 28% Latinos) This means that only 1 of 3 African Americans who need mental health care receives it.

The treatment that African American clients receive tends to be more intensive (inpatient, residential)

Underrepresentation of African American clients engaging in outpatient psychotherapy

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## Who Do You Know ?



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## Who Do You Know ?



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## Factors That Increase the Likelihood of Developing Mental Illness

- High homicide rates
- High school drop out rates
- High unemployment rates
- High rates of homelessness
- Incarceration
- Living in an urban community
- Tendency not to seek preventive health services.
- Reaching out later than other groups once symptoms develop
- Dealing in an ongoing way with racism, poverty, and prejudice

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## Barriers to Mental Health Care

- African Americans are less likely than their White counterparts to find a therapist who looks like them.
- African Americans are more likely than many others to seek help from non-professionals including family, social, and religious groups

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## Barriers to Mental Health Care

### African American Cultural Values & Beliefs

- Mental health is controlled by willpower and faith
- Don't share personal business outside of the home
- Seeing a therapist is a sign of weakness or lack of faith
- Therapy is for those with a character flaw
- Mental health is a problem within the individual, not an illness

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## Barriers to Mental Health Care

African Americans are more likely to become depressed

African Americans are more likely to be hospitalized and receive involuntary treatment

African Americans are more likely to be treated in an emergency room

African Americans are less likely to stay in treatment and to be offered outpatient psychotherapy or newer treatments

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## Values and Racial Identity

- Racial Identity development
- Conformity
- Dissonance
- Resistance and Immersion
- Introspection
- Integrative Awareness

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## Stigma - Economic

- Fewer Financial Resources
- Proximity of Services

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## Stigma - Historical

- Support from church
- Strong race of people = immune to mental health
- Fear that system will not recognize cultural issues
- Mental health was designed by Whites for Whites
- Mental health system has unjustly researched us

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## Stigma - Psychological

- Trauma is normalized
- Wearing a 'mask'
- Symptom expression
- Uncertainty regarding expectations of the process
- Healthy Cultural Paranoia
- Cultural misunderstanding regarding diagnosis

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## Stigma - Psychological

- Micro-insults = delusions
- Emotional reticence = paranoia or severely mentally ill
- Dissociative experiences = psychotic
- Unfamiliarity with slang = thought disorder
- Irritable = criminal
- No energy = physical problem

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## Resulting Fears

- Shame
- Rejection
- Disconnection
- Further Marginalization
- “Angry Black Man/Woman”
- Being Unemployable

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## Resulting Fears

- Not Being Believed
- Weak
- Hurt Family
- “Crazy”
- Mistreatment by Mental Health System
- Involuntary Hospitalization

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## What Can We Do ?

- Public Education Campaigns



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## Public Education Campaigns



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## What Can We Do?

- Conduct programs within African American communities
- Identify and make free resources available
- Increase cultural competence in providers
- Culturally sensitive treatment
- Increased comfort with conversations about race & culture

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## What Can We Do ?

- Psychoeducation
- Incorporate the family into treatment



- Make psychotherapy less intimidating

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## Resources

- NAMI - National Alliance on Mental Illness
- SAMHSA - Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
- "Call Me Crazy"
- Assessing and Treating Culturally Diverse Clients
- Black Families in Therapy

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