

Mental Health: Know the Warning Signs



African Americans are one of the largest communities in the US but often receive disproportionately less and lower quality care than other communities for both medical as well as mental health care. The following provides some insight into mental health rates, cultural views on mental health and other information related to mental health care for the African American community.

Prevalence

The rates of mental health conditions in the African American community are close to those in the general population. Approximately 1 in 5 adults and 1 in 5 children live with a mental health condition. However, African Americans are 20% more likely to experience serious psychological distress than White Americans.ⁱ

Depression

- African Americans and Caribbean Americans are less likely to experience major depression (10.4% and 12.9% respectively) than White Americans, but are twice as likely to experience more chronic forms of depression (56.6% and 56% versus 38.6%).ⁱⁱ Both groups were more likely to be persistently ill in comparison to White Americans.ⁱⁱⁱ

Suicide

- Suicide, overall is the 16th leading cause of death among African Americans, but is the 3rd leading cause of death in young African Americans (15-24).^{iv}
- In 2009, more than four times as many African American men died from suicide than African American women.^v

- 57.8% of African Americans who reported suicidal thoughts or attempted suicide did not seek out mental health care services in comparison to 24.7% of Whites.^{vi}

Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADD/ADHD)

- Teachers are more likely to perceive African American students (both male and female) as having symptoms related to ADHD than White students.^{vii}
- In comparison to White and Latino children, African Americans are likely to be over diagnosed with ADHD and are less likely to receive any form of treatment.^{viii}

Help Seeking Behavior

- Cultural biases against mental health and health care professionals in general prevent many African Americans from accessing care due to prior experiences with historical misdiagnoses, inadequate treatment and a lack of cultural understanding.^{ix}
- African Americans tend to rely on family, religious and social communities for emotional support rather than turning to health care professionals, even though this may at times be necessary.^x
- One in three African American women will seek out mental health care services when diagnosed with a mental health condition. This reluctance is possibly due to a lack of understanding of symptoms related to specific mental health conditions or due to the belief that seeking treatment indicates lack of religious faith.^{xi}

Treatment Considerations

- African Americans men are more likely to receive a misdiagnosis of schizophrenia, when expressing symptoms related to mood disorders or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In addition, African Americans (especially men), may receive less effective and riskier forms of treatment, as well as be treated more strictly in a medical environment (such as being restrained or placed in seclusion).^{xii}
- African Americans may metabolize many medications at lower rates than Whites. Yet African Americans are more likely to receive higher dosages, which may result in a greater chance of adverse side-effects.
- The strength of faith and church supports can supplement depression treatment and reduce isolation.

- Somatic symptoms (experiencing physical symptoms such as headaches or backaches), are more likely to occur in African Americans, specifically African American women.^{xiii}

Access and Utilization of Services

- African Americans are less likely to receive accurate diagnoses than their Caucasian counterparts.^{xiv}
- African Americans are often at a socioeconomic disadvantage in terms of accessing both medical and mental health care: According to the U.S. Census Bureau, as of 2012 19% of African Americans have no form of health insurance.^{xv} With the addition of the ACA (Affordable Care Act) enacted in 2014 it is expected that African Americans will have more access to different medical as well as mental health care services.
- Currently, only 3.7% of members in the American Psychiatric Association and 1.5% of members in the American Psychological Association are African American.^{xvi}

For more information visit www.nami.org/aka

ⁱ Office of Minority Health (2013). Mental health and African Americans. *Office of Minority Health*. Retrieved on August 18, 2014 from <http://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/omh/browse.aspx?lvl=4&lvlID=24>.

ⁱⁱ <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/news/science-news/2007/african-americans-black-caribbeans-and-whites-differ-in-depression-risk-treatment.shtml>. Accessed August 20, 2014.

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://archpsyc.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=482214&resultClick=3>. Accessed August 20, 2014.

^{iv} Suicide among Racial/Ethnic populations in the U.S.: Blacks. (2013). Retrieved Retrieved from <http://www.sprc.org/sites/sprc.org/files/library/Blacks%20Sheet%20August%2028%202013%20Final.pdf>

^v <http://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/omh/browse.aspx?lvl=4&lvlID=24>

^{vi} Suicide among Racial/Ethnic populations in the U.S.: Blacks. (2013). Retrieved Retrieved from <http://www.sprc.org/sites/sprc.org/files/library/Blacks%20Sheet%20August%2028%202013%20Final.pdf>

^{vii} Bryant, S. M. (2005). Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and ethnicity: A literature review. *McNair Scholars Journal*, 9: 35–44. Retrieved from <http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1047&context=mcnair>

^{viii} Bryant, S. M. (2005).

^{ix} American Psychiatric Association. (2014). African Americans. Retrieved from <http://www.psychiatry.org/african-americans>

^x American Psychiatric Association. (2014). African Americans. Retrieved from <http://www.psychiatry.org/african-americans>

^{xi} Office of Women's Health (2010). Minority women's Health: Mental health problems and suicide. *Office of Women's Health*. Retrieved on August 25, 2014 from <http://womenshealth.gov/minority-health/african-americans/mental-health.html#pubs>.

^{xii} Lawson, William, M.D., Ph. D. (2013). How Americans' view of black men affects mental health care. Retrieved from <http://psychnews.psychiatryonline.org/newsarticle.aspx?articleid=1758958>

^{xiii} *The handbook of African American psychology* (2009). In Neville H., Tynes B. and Utsey S. O. (Eds.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

^{xiv} American Psychiatric Association. (2014). African Americans. Retrieved from <http://www.psychiatry.org/african-americans>

Lawson, William, M.D., Ph. D. (2013). How Americans' view of black men affects mental health care. Retrieved from

<http://psychnews.psychiatryonline.org/newsarticle.aspx?articleid=1758958>

^{xv} Income, poverty, and health insurance coverage in the united states: 2012. (2013). Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/prod/2013pubs/p60-245.pdf>

^{xvi} Rhodes, L. (2014). Help wanted: African American mental health professionals. Retrieved from http://www.nami.org/template.cfm?Section=Top_Story&template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=168619&lstd=809