

BROTHER, YOU'RE ON MY MIND

Mental Health Snapshot of African American Men

Mental health is a topic that many African American men consider taboo and do not often discuss. The fact is that depression is one of the most common mental illnesses but an underrecognized and undertreated problem among African American men. Common beliefs about mental health within the African American community include the following:

- Ω Being depressed is just normal, and talking about it is weak.
- Ω Getting help is the same as telling your business to a stranger.
- Ω Nobody cares about your mental health anyway.

These statements are not true. Mental illness is real and affects us all, whether or not we choose to talk about it.



DID YOU KNOW?



About one in five Americans struggle with a mental illness in any given year, regardless of their race.



African Americans are 20 percent more likely to have serious psychological distress than Whites are.



Depression is one of the most common mental health problems in the United States, affecting more than 17 million people each year.



About 7 percent of Americans experience serious depression each year.



African Americans' depressive occurrences are more disabling, persistent, and resistant to treatment than those experienced by Whites.



Suicide is the third leading cause of death among African Americans ages 15 to 24.



African American men are four times more likely to die by suicide than African American women are.



Less than half of all Americans with a mental disorder get the treatment that they need. But the proportion of African Americans who need mental health treatment and get it is only half that of Whites.

It's clear that depression and other mental illnesses are just as important for African Americans, particularly African American men, as they are for Americans in general. Ignoring those problems or pretending that they don't exist won't make them go away.

KNOW THE SIGNS; RECOGNIZE THE PROBLEMS

Everybody feels down or sad occasionally, but these feelings usually pass within a few days. When feelings of sadness, worry, and hopelessness last for weeks at a time and affect your ability to manage your daily life, you may be experiencing serious depression.

Both men and women get depressed, but men experience depression differently. Men who are depressed may be more likely to be very tired, feel irritable, and have difficulty sleeping. They may be more likely to lose interest in work, family, and hobbies.

For African American men and their families, neglecting mental health needs can be devastating. When mental disorders like depression aren't treated, African American men are more vulnerable to drug or alcohol use, homelessness, incarceration, homicide, and suicide.

The most important thing you can do if you have a problem is recognize it. Depression is not a weakness. It is an illness that can cause disability and even death. But depression is a treatable illness. Your doctor may be able to help.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE BARRIERS?

Social circumstances can contribute to a likelihood of developing a mental illness. African Americans are more likely to experience economic distress, racism, and other social circumstances that increase their chances of developing depression or other mental illnesses.

Access to adequate treatment for mental health problems can be difficult for African Americans, for the following reasons:

- Ω African Americans are less likely to have health insurance.
- Ω African Americans are less likely to receive an accurate mental health diagnosis and, for those who are diagnosed with depression, less likely to receive treatment than their White counterparts are.
- Ω Cultural mistrust of mental health professionals and health care professionals in general is common in the African American community.
- Ω Only a small proportion of mental health professionals are African American.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

Historically, African Americans have relied on religious and social communities for emotional support. That's one of the reasons for the *Brother, You're on My Mind* initiative. Making faith and social communities more aware of the mental illnesses that members face will help these groups support their members, encourage African American men to acknowledge their own needs, and provide resources for members who need help that the community alone can't give.

Organizations with useful information and outreach to African American communities include the following:

- Ω National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD), <http://www.nimhd.nih.gov>
- Ω National Institute of Mental Health, <http://www.nimh.nih.gov>
- Ω U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <http://www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/>
- Ω Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, <http://www.samhsa.gov>
- Ω National Alliance on Mental Illness, <http://www.nami.org>
- Ω National Medical Association, <http://www.nmanet.org>
- Ω Capstone Institute/Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk, Howard University, <http://www.capstoneinstitute.org>
- Ω Lee Thompson Young Foundation, <http://www.leethompsonyoungfoundation.org>
- Ω Mental Health America, <http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/african-american-mental-health>
- Ω National Black Nurses Association, <http://www.nbna.org>

