

## **Mental Health and the African American Community**

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After weeks of weeping and mourning, the African Americans community in Mount Pleasant and many people around the Low-country have not come to the full realization of what happened in the traditional African American community called Hamlin, nestled away in the constantly changing fabric of Mount Pleasant, SC. (The death of four family members)

I was personally touched by this incident as I knew the victims and victimizer, but I knew neither very well, meeting them in my travels to the barber shop and the shrimp house to purchase oysters. However, it was those moments of interactions that stirs me to write this article. Could there have been something I could have said that could have made a difference in this heinous incident? I could have maybe said, "hey I worked in the field of mental health for over 25 years, so if you know anyone that needs help, have them call me". I don't know if offering such help would have made any difference, but it could have!! So, in response to that possibility, I would like to share some advice in terms of identifying mental illness and resources that can be accessed to support families who may be facing mental health concerns, especially those in the African-American community, who suffer a higher rate of mental illness overall.

I recall an incident that occurred years ago while working at a mental health clinic, where a psychotic individual stabbed his mother over fifty times, after just leaving the clinic. He was there searching for his brother, whom was a client at the clinic. This person's behavior gave very little indication that he could just minute later would commit such a brutal act, especially upon his mother. Even those with the most trained eyes cannot be completely clear about the

behaviors and actions of a person who is psychotic. When dealing with persons that we suspect to be psychotic we must seek help immediately. Professional help!!!!While the church is the anchor of our community, we must understand that our creator has provided places to help us with these types of problems and bringing someone suffering from a mental illness to church for healing is not always the best answer. We can sometime do both, but we should never fail to seek professional treatment.

Now, when talking about persons who suffer from psychosis, these persons are usually experiencing a break with reality or how they view and think about the world around them. It makes it difficult for them to recognize what is real and what isn't. According to National Alliance for Mental Illness, (NamI) psychosis is experienced by 3 % of the population at some time in life. This includes many young people and children whom over 50% never received professional mental health services, according to a nationally representative survey funded in part by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH).

In terms of African-American, research suggest that African Americans experience more severe forms of mental health and many times suffer with mental symptoms and conditions that go unmet. Because of barriers like no health care, poverty or simply being unaware of how mental health works, many African-Americans fail to receive the mental health services they desperately need. According to the Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health, African Americans have a higher rate of mental illness (20% more likely to suffer from mental health problems) than the general population.

Common mental health disorders among African Americans include:

- **Major depression**
- **Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)**
- **Suicide among young African American men**
- **Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)**

### **Major depression**

Depression (major depressive disorder or clinical depression) is a common but serious mood disorder. It causes severe symptoms that affect your physical energy level, reasons why you're not eating or maybe overeating. Some persons suffer from sleep problems and report always feeling sad. We all get sad and feel down at times but when we feel that way for more than two weeks, there is usually some depression involved.

Some forms of depression are:

*Persistent depressive disorder* - when a depressed feeling persist for 24 months or longer.

*Postpartum depression* – when mothers suffer with feeling depressed during or after birth. This form of depression very common but seldom treated.

*Psychotic depression*- when a person has severe depression and psychosis- *loses a grasp on reality*. Psychosis symptoms may include having disturbing false beliefs (delusions) and hearing or seeing things (hallucinations).

*Seasonal affective disorder* -when one because depression during the winter months, when there is less natural sunlight.

### **Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)**

ADHD is the inability of the brain to concentrate which affects a person ability to function. The three major symptoms are:

- *Inattention*- means a person not staying on task or staying focused.
- *Hyperactivity*- means a person seems to be moving around and constantly touching, taps, or talks.
- *Impulsivity* - means a person makes poorly informed decisions in the matter of moment not understand seriousness of the action; or a desire for immediate rewards for their actions.

The rate of ADHD is almost the same among African Americans and Caucasians but African Americans are **diagnosed with and treated for ADHD** at a lower rate.

### **Suicide, among young African American men**

Suicide is the third leading cause of death among black males ages 15-24, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. College students are especially prone to suicide and there is a growing number of suicides in the African-American communities. Although African Americans suicide rates are lower overall, suicide among youth are of concern with suicide being the third leading cause of death African –American between the ages of 15-24. Overall African-

American also tends to commit suicide at a younger age (age 32 compare to Caucasian age 44). This also strongly impact African American community as the African –American population tends to be mainly populated by younger people.

### **Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)**

Studies examining African-American rate of Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) suggest that the African –American population experienced a high rate of severe trauma that commonly goes undetected and untreated. This is especially concerning among African Americans with low socioeconomic status. The high homicide rate in the African- American community is a strong indication of trauma, which can directly leads to PTSD. African American women and children are especially affected by mental illness and tend to have higher rates of PTSD. Those who get treatment for PTSD tend to have better outcomes and can be relieved of traumatic feeling over time. Strengthening psychological and economic health of African American families will benefit the African- African community as a whole.

### **How Do Mental Health Conditions Affect The African American Community?**

African Americans are experiencing more severe mental health condition and most of these mental health conditions go untreated. According to the Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health, African Americans are 20% more likely to experience serious mental health problems than the general population. African Americans are also more likely to experience certain factors that increase the risk for developing a mental health condition like **Homelessness and Exposure to violence**. Persons at risk or experiencing homelessness are at a greater risk of developing a mental health condition. African Americans make up 40% of the homeless population. **Exposure to violence** increases the risk of developing a mental health condition such

as depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder. African American children are more likely to be exposed to violence than other children.

### **Issues to Consider**

There are different reasons that prevent African Americans from seeking treatment and receiving quality care for mental illness. In the African American community, there is a misunderstanding about mental health and frankly, there needs to be more conversation about mental health that provides more knowledge about how to cope with trauma and abuse. This can lead to the seeking out of mental health treatment. We must understand that having a mental health condition is not a sense of weakness or a curse from God. Mental health issues and the lack of treatment, however, can lead to suicide, homicide, childhood trauma and in reality, self-hate. While most tragic issues in our community are labeled as “SENSELESS”, there are reasons and causes behind these events. It is sometime because of the shame and stigma that is associated with mental health, we don't openly discuss these issues. However, it is only through such conversation that we can identify mental health problems and prevent these tragedies.

### **Why Does Mental Health Matter?**

If you feel you or a loved one might be experiencing a mental health condition, it is important that you seek out treatment. Seeking mental health treatment immediately can lead to a strengthening oneself and the ability to cope with mental illness in the future. Many times treatment can involve just speaking to a mental health professional who can give advice. However, some conditions may need more intensive therapies or treatments. Decreasing the amount of trauma, stress and negative social interaction we experience, would decrease the amount mental illness in our communities overall. Below is a list of Mental Health resources:

Tri-county area:

*Palmetto Low country Behavioral Health*

*North Charleston, SC (843) 747-5830 Open 24 hours*

*Charleston Dorchester Mental Health Center*

*Charleston, SC (843) 852-4100*

*South Carolina Mental Health*

*Charleston, SC (843) 727-2005*

*Palmetto Lowcountry Behavioral Health*

*North Charleston, SC (843) 747-5830*

*MUSC Institute of Psychiatry*

*Psychiatric Hospital*

*Charleston, SC (843) 792-9888*

*Cognitive & Behavioral Health Center of Charleston*

*Mental Health Clinic*

*Charleston, SC (843) 501-7001*

*Center for Behavioral Health*

*Drug Addiction Treatment Center*

*North Charleston, SC (843) 529-0700*

***Life Resources***

***Mental Health Service***

***Mt Pleasant, SC (843) 884-3888***

***Medical University of South Carolina behavioral health***

***Mental Health Clinic***

***Charleston, SC (843) 792-0037***

***Therapy Studios***

***North Charleston, SC (843) 501-0903***

***Steven Lopez, M.D. Carolina Coast Behavioral Services***

***Mental Health Service***

***Charleston, SC (843) 259-8853***

***Roper St. Francis Physician Partners - Behavioral Medicine***

***Charleston, SC (843) 958-2555 Closed · Opens 8AM Thu***

***New Directions Behavioral Health North***

***North Charleston, SC (843) 737-6350***

*Charleston Counseling Center*

*Mental Health Service*

*Charleston, SC (843) 501-1099*

*Youth Advocate Program*

*Mental Health Service*

*Charleston, SC (843) 554-2555*

*Davidson Sandy*

*Family Counselor*

*Charleston, SC (843) 737-6350*

*The MENTOR Network*

*Mental Health Service*

*Charleston, SC (843) 573-1905*

## ONLINE RESOURCE

- *Struggling with Anxiety: Create your own profile at Anxiety Social Net ([anxietysocialnet.com](http://anxietysocialnet.com)) to connect with people dealing with everything from social anxiety to agoraphobia. Prefer to meet in person? Find a state-by-state list of support groups at the Anxiety and Depression Association of America's website ([adaa.org](http://adaa.org)).*
- *Struggling with Depression or Bipolar Disorder: Locate an in-person or online group at the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance site ([dbsalliance.org](http://dbsalliance.org)).*
- *Struggling with Postpartum Depression: The Postpartum Progress site ([postpartumprogress.com](http://postpartumprogress.com)) lists support groups in nearly every state as well as in Canada and maintains an online forum.*
- *Struggling with Schizophrenia: The Schizophrenia and Related Disorders Alliance of America facilitate groups nationwide; find one on its site ([sardaa.org](http://sardaa.org)). You can also dial into its phone groups (855-640-8271) at 7 P.M. ET Sunday, Thursday and Friday with the pass code 88286491#.*
- *Plagued by Obsessive-Compulsive Thoughts and Behaviors: More than 200 groups are listed with the International OCD Foundation ([iocdf.org](http://iocdf.org)), which aids those affected by the disorder and their families.*
- *The Adult Child of an Alcoholic: The Adult Children of Alcoholics World Service Organization maintains numerous support groups and hosts call-in and online sessions ([meetings.adultchildren.org](http://meetings.adultchildren.org)).*
- *Grieving Someone Who Died by Suicide: Join one of the many groups for*

*survivors listed on the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention website (afsp.org).*

- *A Survivor of Rape, Sexual Assault or Incest: After Silence (aftersilence.org) is a message board and chat room for victims of sexual violence. Additionally, Adult Survivors of Child Abuse (ascasupport.org) organizes support groups around the U.S. and abroad, and offers resources for those who want to start their own.*
- *Battling Anorexia, Bulimia, Bing Eating or Food Addiction: Eating Disorder Hope catalogs online support groups(eatingdisorderhope.com/recovery/support-groups/onlineBattling*
- *Sex Addiction: Sex Addicts Anonymous (saa-recovery.org), similar to Alcoholics Anonymous, offers a widespread network of in-person, online, and phone meetings.*
- *Self-Harming: Daily Strength hosts a web forum where people dealing with self-injury can find encouragement, understanding, and a new way to cope (dailystrength.org/group/self-injury).*
- *A Veteran Who Is Injured Or Has PTSD: The VA Combat Call Center—877-WAR-VETS (877-927-8387)—is staffed 24/7 by fellow combat veterans or spouses of disabled veterans who can offer immediate help; the Vet Center program site (vetcenter.va.gov) can direct visitors to both group and private counseling sessions in their area.*