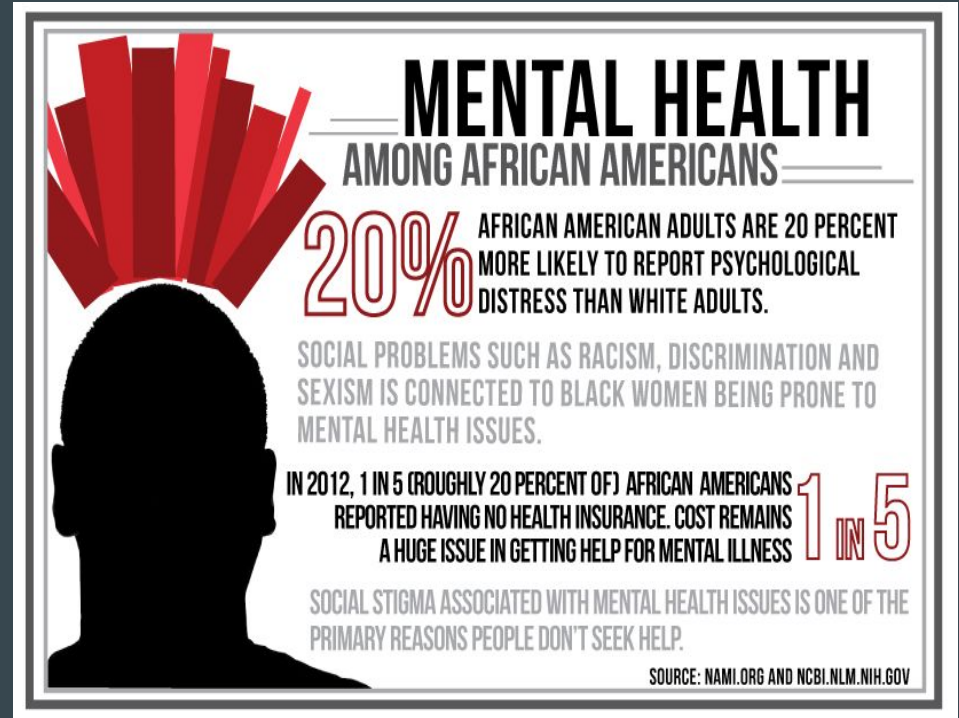# Addressing African American Community's Mental Health Needs

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Multicultural Education Conference 2020
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Examining Mental Health Care Institution's Relationship with the African American Community

- The lack of data from psychological studies involving Black participants prevents some practitioners from adequately diagnosing and treating Black clients

- With deeper understanding of Black Americans' experiences and culture, clinicians can adapt mental health practices to meet the community's needs

MENTAL HEALTH AMONG AFRICAN AMERICANS

20% AFRICAN AMERICAN ADULTS ARE 20 PERCENT MORE LIKELY TO REPORT PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS THAN WHITE ADULTS.

SOCIAL PROBLEMS SUCH AS RACISM, DISCRIMINATION AND SEXISM IS CONNECTED TO BLACK WOMEN BEING PRONE TO MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES.

IN 2012, 1 IN 5 (ROUGHLY 20 PERCENT OF) AFRICAN AMERICANS REPORTED HAVING NO HEALTH INSURANCE. COST REMAINS A HUGE ISSUE IN GETTING HELP FOR MENTAL ILLNESS 1 IN 5

SOCIAL STIGMA ASSOCIATED WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES IS ONE OF THE PRIMARY REASONS PEOPLE DON'T SEEK HELP.

SOURCE: NAMI.ORG AND NCBI.NLM.NIH.GOV

"African Americans and Euro-Americans display symptomatology essentially the same with diagnostic errors resulting from clinician stereotypes; and (2) African Americans and Euro-Americans display psychopathology differently and diagnosticians incorrectly assume it is the same with diagnostic errors resulting from clinicians being unaware of or insensitive to cultural differences in how the same disorder can be displayed differently according to race."

- *Schwartz & Blankenship, 2014*

- Historically the mental health and counseling professions centered around western individualistic values with the goal of helping clients achieve self-actualization through the therapeutic process (Ivey, Ivey, & Zalaquett, 2016)

- Though traditional counseling theories may be effective for individuals who identify with traditional western identities such as individualism and achievement, these intervention strategies may not be as effective for individuals and families deriving from collectivistic cultures such as the African American community (Bounds, Washington, & Henfield, 2018)

- As the mental health field undergoes a transformation to account for diversity and cultural competency, it is imperative to focus on catering mental health care services and treatments to accommodate the unique needs and experiences of African American individuals and families

Barriers to Access

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Systemic Barriers to Access

Stressors on Diverse Ethnic/Racial Groups

RACISM
DISCRIMINATION
POVERTY
VIOLENCE

MENTAL HEALTH DISPARITIES FACTORS

Members of ethnic and racial minority groups in the U.S. "face a social and economic environment of inequality that includes greater exposure to racism, discrimination, violence, and poverty, all of which take a toll on mental health."

– U.S. SURGEON GENERAL

Source: https://images.app.goo.gl/Q14C2i1WBXyJ5MRj6

- Some identified systemic barriers preventing African American people from seeking and receiving quality services include:

  - Institutional racism (Sawyer, Major, Casad, Townsend, & Mendes, 2012)

  - Less likely to have work-life flexibility and income levels to afford the opportunity to receive therapeutic services (Bounds et al., 2018)

  - Misdiagnosis, over diagnosis, and delayed diagnosis at the hands of mental health professionals (Schwartz & Blankenship, 2014; Hatcher, 2012)

Intercommunal Barriers to Access

- Community Challenges (Ivey et. al, 2016)

  - Mistrust in the mental health institution due to long history of maltreatment and unethical practices against African American individuals

  - Over reliance on religion and community members for comfort

  - Lack of access to affordable and quality resources

 - Misinformation about mental health and mental health treatment

Source: https://images.app.goo.gl/iXmE1FTHsJ8fYLd38
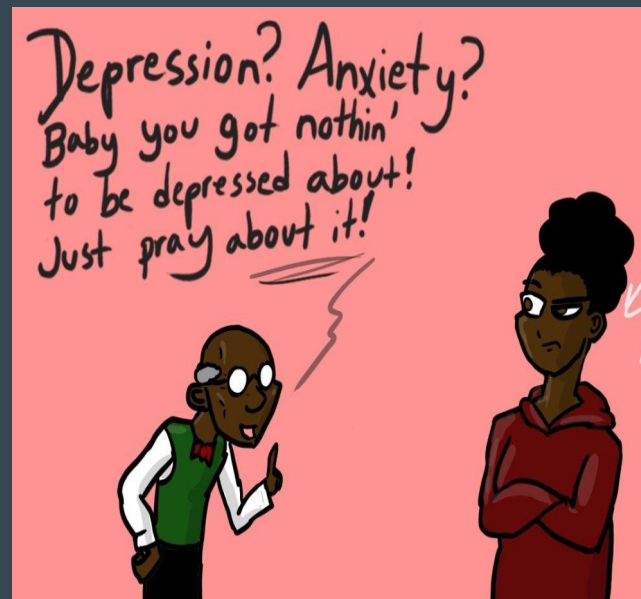
Racial Bias in Counseling Practice

Limitations of Eurocentric Psychotherapeutic Practice

In using traditional Eurocentric psychotherapeutic approaches without incorporating multicultural competencies and client empowerment (Camp, 2015), practitioners limit the treatment efficacy for clients of African descent:

- Moore and McDowell (2014) and Bell-Tolliver, Burgess, and Brock (2009) state that existing research focuses primarily on pathology rather than strengths when studying and implementing family, couples and individual therapy for African Americans

- The lack of well-rounded data and biases against African Americans prevent some practitioners from accurately diagnosing and adequately treating African American clients (Bounds et al., 2018; Hairston, Laux, O'Hara, Roseman, & Gore, 2018)

Racial Disparities in Mental Health Treatment

Groups report feeling that they would have received better mental health care if they were a different race or ethnicity.

| 15% | 13% | 11% |
| African - Americans | Latinos | Asian- Americans |
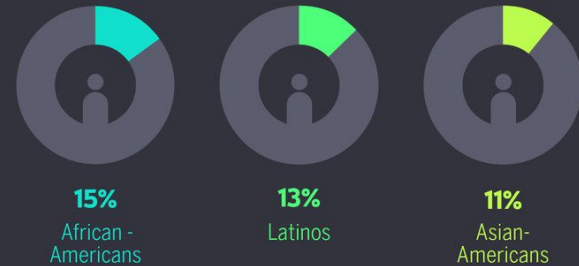
SOCIALWORK@SIMMONS
Source: National Alliance on Mental Illness

Source: https://socialwork.simmons.edu/racial-disparities-in-mental-health-treatment/

Limitations of Eurocentric Psychotherapeutic Practice Cont'd

This narrow perspective fails to account for the values of many Black individuals including (Bounds et al., 2018, p. 266):

- Collectivism
- Communalism
- Kinship bonds
- Spirituality
- Extended family relationships
- Collective child-rearing practices
- Fictive kinships

- Assertiveness
- Expressive communication
- Educational attainment
- Respect for elders
- Gender equitable relationships
- Keeping family business within the family

Bias in Clinical Testing

Widely used tools such as the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI), Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), and the Rorschach Test have been misused amongst African American populations, possibly resulting in misdiagnoses (Washington, Malone, Briggs, & Reed, 2016).
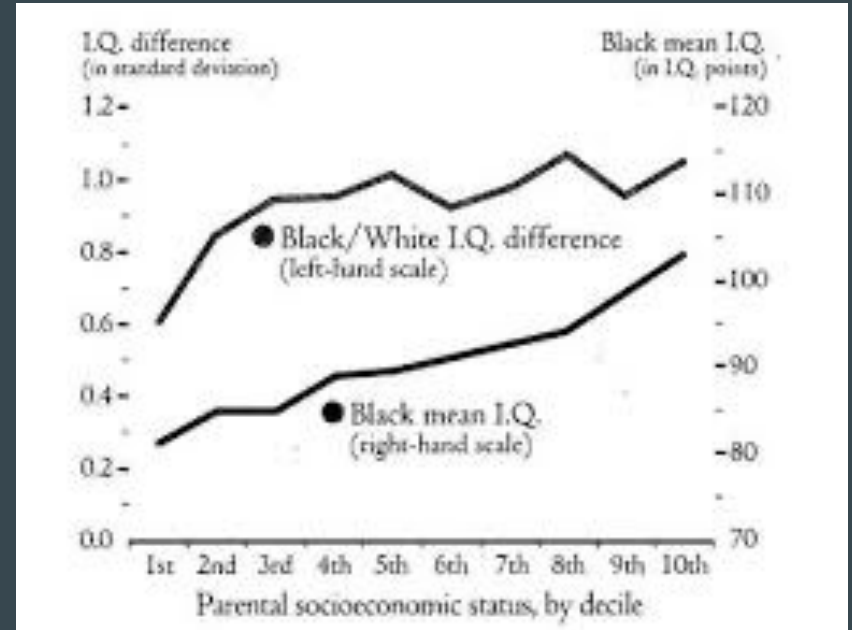
Cultivating Psychotherapeutic Practices for Clients of African Descent

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Using Strength-Based Approach in Clinical Work with African Americans

- Dossman (2012) suggest three specific interventions practitioners should consider incorporating into their practice with clients of African descent:

    - Psycho-educational presentations/discussions during the initial sessions to decrease clients' negative pre-conditionings

    - Address pre-conditionings during the intake sessions to normalize the client's fears and concerns regarding mental health care services

    - Share the importance of counseling services through outreach initiatives and partnerships with community-based organizations

Deconstructing the 'One Size Fits all Approach'

In addition to being informed of communal resources to assist African American clients in meeting their needs, the counselor should:

- Have a basic understanding of race-based trauma (Hemmings & Evans, 2018)

- Avoid a "one-size fits all" approach and maintain flexibility (Bounds et al., 2018)

- Have the ability to assess if and how the client's culture identity is related to the presenting problem (Ivey et al., 2016).

Source: Minority Mental Health Care ...nami.org

Future Research Implications
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A Call for Afrocentric Research

There is a great need for Afro-centric research that will continue to inform and improve therapeutic practices clinicians can use with clients of African descent.

Though there is an abundance of research about African Americans in relation to mental health, psychology, and counseling practices, there is still a shortage of data capturing the first-hand experience of different individuals, couples, and families of African descent who have used or sought out mental health care services.

Before practitioners can create interventions to best serve clients of African descent, the field needs to understand this population and its various nuances through. This can be accomplished by gathering qualitative data from African American participants with various intersecting identities.

As attitudes and understandings of mental health and mental illness in the African American community have shifted between different age cohorts, researchers should consider conducting studies focused on participants within the Baby Boomer, Gen X, Millennial, and Gen Z generations

The implications of such studies would provide more accurate insight into the modern mental health care needs of African American people and therefore inform the next wave of therapeutic interventions and necessary skills/competencies counselors must poses before working with clients of African descent

Sources: https://images.app.goo.gl/RbTEU5kSbQskfGSn7 ;https://www.apa.org/advocacy/civil-rights/diversity/african-american-health

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