

HEALTHY LINKS



Brought to you by Dr. Susan Taylor
Member Health and Human Services Committee
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Mental Health Awareness

Modified from blackwomenshealth.com

At the beginning of the 21st century, African American women find themselves achieving new heights and reaching new milestones. Education and hard work have allowed Black women to achieve professional success and have fulfilling careers. Many women have wonderful spouses and children to enrich their lives. Despite this good news, life can also be very stressful and many Black women still find themselves lagging behind Caucasian women and other women in health and mental health indices. For example, depression affects between 17 and 20 million Americans each year but the depression rate among African American women is estimated to be almost 50% higher than that of Caucasian women.

The Centers for Disease Control also finds that just 7.6 percent of African-Americans sought treatment for depression compared to 13.6 percent of the general population in 2011. Black women are among the most undertreated groups for depression in the nation, which can have serious consequences on the African-American community. To make matters worse, only 2% of the nation's psychologists are African American.

We think that the rates of mental health problems are higher than average for Black women because of psychological factors that result directly from our experience as Black Americans. These experiences include racism, cultural alienation, violence and sexual exploitation.

It has historically been difficult to treat mental health problems in African American women. One reason for this is that Black women tend to minimize the serious nature of their problems. Many believe their symptoms are "just the blues" and they are often not proactive in changing their condition.

There also exists a stigma placed on mental health problems within African American culture and the belief that these issues are a sign of personal weakness, not a sickness.

African American women tend to rely on supports other than mental health services. There is a strong reliance on community, the support of family, and the religious community during periods of emotional distress, all of which help African American women with depression. Black women seek mental health care less than white women; and, when they do seek it, do so later in life and at later stages of their illness.

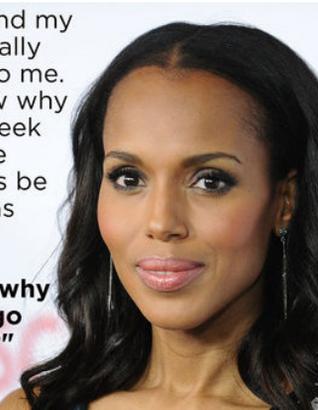
Part of the explanation for this is the poor service they often receive from mental health professionals who, historically, have consistently under-diagnosed disorders like depression and over-diagnosed disorders like schizophrenia in the African American community. In addition, because of socioeconomic factors Black women may have limited access to health care compared to whites.

The most common ways to treat clinical depression are with antidepressant medication, psychotherapy, or a combination of the two. The choice of treatment depends on how severe the depressive symptoms are and the history of the illness. The most important step is to reach out, seek and accept help.

"My brain and my heart are really important to me. I don't know why I wouldn't seek help to have those things be as healthy as my teeth.

I go to the dentist. So why wouldn't I go to a shrink?"

-Kerry Washington



Mental Health and African Americans

- Poverty level affects mental health status. African Americans living below the poverty level, as compared to those over twice the poverty level, are 3 times more likely to report psychological distress.
- African Americans are 10% more likely to report having serious psychological distress than Non-Hispanic whites.
- The death rate from suicide for African American men was more than four times greater than for African American women, in 2014.
- However, the suicide rate for African Americans is 70% lower than that of the non-Hispanic white population.
- A report from the U.S. Surgeon General found that from 1980 - 1995, the suicide rate among African Americans ages 10 to 14 increased 233%, as compared to 120% of non-Hispanic whites.¹

MENTAL HEALTH STATUS

Percent of population with feelings of sadness, hopelessness, worthlessness, or that everything is an effort all of the time, among persons 18 years of age and over, 2014 - Women

	Non-Hispanic Black Women	Non-Hispanic White Women	Non-Hispanic Black Women/ Non-Hispanic White Women Ratio
Sadness	3.9	2.9	1.3
Hopelessness	2.4	1.9	1.3
Worthlessness	1.8	1.6	1.1
Everything is an effort	9.9	5.8	1.7

Source: CDC 2016. Summary Health Statistics: National Health Interview Survey: 2014. Table A-7.

<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhis/shs/tables.htm>

Percent of population with feelings of nervousness or restlessness, among persons 18 years of age and over, 2014

	Non-Hispanic Black	Non-Hispanic White	Non-Hispanic Black/ Non-Hispanic White Ratio
Nervousness, all or most of time	4.0	4.6	0.9
Restlessness, all or most of time	5.4	6.0	0.9

Source: CDC 2016. Summary Health Statistics: National Health Interview Survey: 2014. Table A-8.

<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhis/shs/tables.htm>

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

Percent of Adults age 18 and over who received mental health treatment or counseling in the past year, 2014

	Non-Hispanic Black	Non-Hispanic White	Non-Hispanic Black/ Non-Hispanic White Ratio
Total	9.4	18.8	0.5

SAMHSA, 2015. Results from the 2014 National Survey on Drug Use and Health:

Mental Health Detailed Tables. Table 1.22B

<http://www.samhsa.gov/data/population-data-nsduh/reports?tab=38>

Symptoms of Clinical Depression

A persistent sad, anxious or “empty” mood, or excessive crying.

Reduced appetite and weight loss or increased appetite and weight gain.

Persistent physical symptoms such as headaches, digestive disorders and chronic pain that does not respond to treatment.

Irritability, restlessness.

Decreased energy, fatigue, feeling “slowed down”.

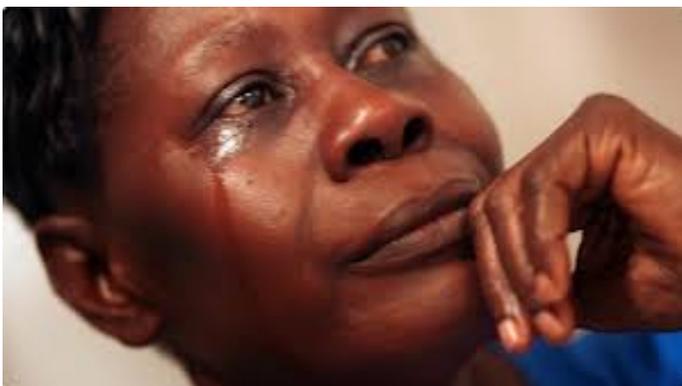
Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, helplessness, hopelessness, pessimism.

Sleeping too much or too little, early-morning waking.

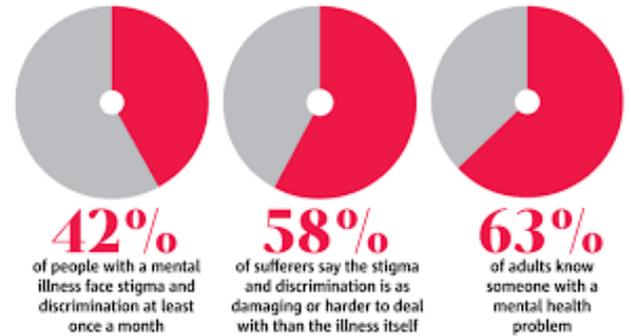
Loss of interest or pleasure in activities, including sex.

Difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions.

Thoughts of death or suicide, or suicide attempts



If you experience five or more for these symptoms for longer than two weeks, if you feel suicidal, or if the symptoms interfere with your daily routine, see your doctor immediately.



Mental Health America works nationally and locally to raise awareness about mental health. We believe that everyone at risk for mental illnesses and related disorders should receive early and effective interventions. Historically, communities of color experience unique and considerable challenges in accessing mental health services.

