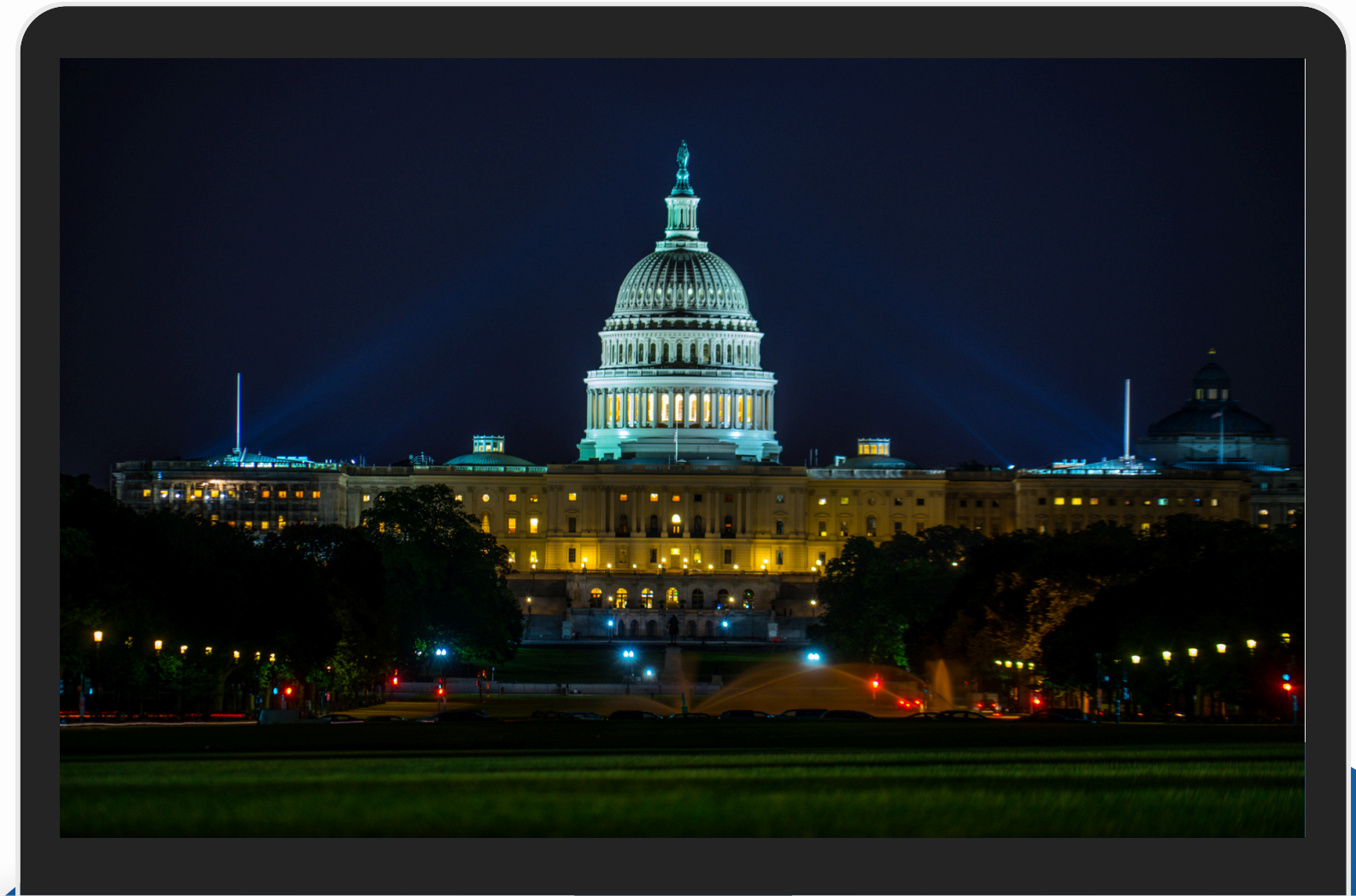


United States Congress & The Mental Health Crisis in African American Communities: Addressing the National Emergency



By Million Heir-Williams
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Our Speech

Esteemed members of the
United States Congress,

Our objective is to enlighten you to cause a shift in the prevailing negative mindset of mainstream America and the laws that govern mental health in this country. There is a stigma that surrounds the narrative of mental health. We must move from a reactive position to a Pro-Active stance. There is a need to transform and challenge the current narrative associated with families affected by this malady.



United States Congress

You Pose the Question...Why Not Other Populations Since Mental Illness Affects All Human Beings?



A Word from The Visionary... Million Heir-Williams

"This is a crucial question to consider. Empirical data clearly shows that African Americans, from birth through old age, are disproportionately affected by this crisis. As a trusted leader in every community I've served, it is my duty to take decisive action and champion this cause. The responsibility to lead this narrative has been entrusted to me, and I will ensure that the voices of those most impacted are heard and addressed."

You Pose the Question...Why Not Other Populations Since Mental Illness Affects All Human Beings? (cont'd.)



A Word from The Visionary... Million Heir-Williams

"Once we establish a comprehensive plan of action to address the mental health concerns within the African American community, supported by adequate funding, we can then expand our focus to other populations across the United States. My ultimate objective is to ensure that all communities in our nation benefit from similar targeted initiatives, with an emphasis on our veterans."



Presenting 50 Female Voices Across The United States of America

Advocacy

We seek to advocate for legislative reforms to enhance our nation's mental health care system.

It is crucial that we reshape the mental health laws to better serve and support those in need.

Funding is desperately needed to assist in this fight for improved mental healthcare reform systems.



National Brand Ambassador

Cheryl “Salt” James, Grammy Award Winner, Author



“By sharing our experiences, we aim to decrease the shame and stigma surrounding these issues, encouraging others to seek the help and support they deserve. I pray this book serves as a light, inspiring all who read it to embrace their truth, seek help without fear, and walk the path of healing with courage.”

US Mental Health Statistics in the African American Population



Mental Health disparities among African Americans overall are much higher than any other group. There are a wide array of reasons such as socio-economic factors, cultural stigmas, and systematic barriers.

PTSS (Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome)



Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS), a term coined by internationally renowned researcher Joy DeGruy, PhD, -

To describe the multigenerational trauma and injustices experienced by African Americans — from the dawn of slavery to the recent deaths of Black citizens at the hands of police.

Statistics

African American Elderly



Mental Health disparities among the **African American Elderly** individuals in the US are significant and reflect broader issues related to access to care, socio-economic factor, and cultural barriers. Here are a few critical statistics:

Prevalence of Mental Disorders

Depression:

- Depression is one of the most common mental health issues among **African American Elderly** individuals. Approximately 8-15% of **African American Elderly** experience depression, which is often underdiagnosed, undertreated and underreported.

Dementia:

- **African American Elderly** are about twice as likely to develop Alzheimer's disease and other dementias compared to Caucasian elderly individuals. This increased risk is influenced by factors such as higher rates of hypertension, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease.

Statistics

African American Men



Mental Health disparities among the **African American Men** in the US reflect a combination of socio-economic factors, cultural stigmas and certainly systematic barriers to care. Here are a few critical statistics:

Prevalence of Mental Disorders

Depression:

- Approximately 6% of **African American Men** experience depression. However, this number is likely underreported due to stigma and a reluctance to seek help.

Anxiety:

- Around 4% of **African American Men** report experiencing anxiety disorders, through the actual prevalence may be higher due to underreporting and cultural factors.

PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder):

- **African American Men** are more likely to experience PTSD, particularly those living in high-crime areas. The lifetime prevalence of PTSD among **African American Men** is estimated to be around 9%.

Statistics

African American Women



Mental health disparities among **African American Women** in the US are significant, reflecting broader social and systemic issues. Here a few key statistics.

Prevalence of Mental Disorders:

- Approximately 20% **African American Women** are likely to experience serious psychological distress than their Caucasian counterparts.
- Approximately 13% of **African American Women** report frequent mental distress, compared to 10% of Caucasian women.

Depression:

Less likely to report than Caucasian women and when **African American Women** do report their symptoms are much more severe.

Anxiety Disorders:

- **African American Women** are 10% more likely to experience generalized anxiety disorder compared to Caucasian women.

Statistics

African American Children



Mental health disparities among **African American Children** in the US are a significant concern, with various factors influencing the prevalence and treatment of these disorders. Here a few key statistics.

Prevalence of Mental Disorders

ADHD (Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder:

- Approximately 9.6% of **African American Children** are diagnosed with ADHD, compared to 9.4% of Caucasian children.

Depression:

Around 3.4% of **African American Children** aged 3-17 have been diagnosed with depression, which is lower than the rate among Caucasian (4.6%).

Anxiety Disorders:

- About 5.7% of **African American Children** are more likely to be diagnosed with behavioral disorders, with approximately 9.9% having a diagnosis compared to 8.7% of Caucasian children.

Access to Medical Care

African American Elderly



Improving access to medical care for African American elderly individuals is essential for enhancing their health outcomes and quality of life. Here are several targeted strategies that could be employed to address this critical issue:

- Culturally Competent Healthcare Services
- Community-Based Health Programs
- Outreach and Education
- Telehealth and Mobile Health
- Insurance and Financial Assistance
- Policy Advocacy
- Partnerships with Other Organizations
- Feedback Mechanisms

These strategies involve a mix of direct medical interventions, community engagement, policy adjustments, and educational initiatives, all aimed at creating a more inclusive and accessible healthcare environment for African American elderly individuals.

Access to Medical Care

African American Men



Underutilization of Mental Health Services:

African American Men are less likely to seek mental health treatment compared to their White counterparts. Only about 25% of **African American Men** who need mental health care receive it, compared to 40% of Caucasian men.

Misdiagnosis:

African American Men are more likely to be misdiagnosed with conditions like schizophrenia and less likely to be diagnosed with mood disorders such as depression or anxiety. This can lead to inappropriate treatment and poorer outcomes.

Access to Medical Care

African American Women



African American Women are less likely to receive mental health treatment compared to White counterparts. Only about 33% of **African American Women** with mental health issues receive treatment, compared to 50% of Caucasian women.

Access to Medical Care

African American Children



In general, the body of research devoted to psychiatric clinical care of US children and adolescents is growing and suggests that **African Americans** are much less likely to enter traditional forms of mental health treatment than their Caucasian counterparts, even when presenting problems are similar. Such rates may reflect the use of nonmedical therapists (e.g., religious leaders, native healers), as well as culturally based resilience, rather than reliance on traditional psychiatric systems.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/>

Improving Access



Community-Based Solutions:

- Initiatives that involve the community, such as mental health awareness programs, support groups, and culturally competent care, can help reduce stigma and improve access. Training volunteers in the **African American** churches for mental wellness preparedness.

Policy Changes:

- Advocacy for policy changes, such as expanding Medicaid and improving insurance coverage for mental health services, can also help address some of the economic barriers. Increased funding for mental health services. Targeted interventions for at-risk populations are essential for addressing these issues.

Training for Providers:

Increasing the number of mental health professionals who are trained in cultural competence and who understand the unique needs of **African Americans** is crucial for improving access to care.

Improving the Educational System



Addressing **African American** mental health issues within the educational system requires thoughtful reforms that consider both the unique challenges faced by this community and the systemic factors contributing to these challenges. Here are some suggestions:

1. Culturally Responsive Mental Health Services

Increase Representation: Schools should prioritize hiring **African American** counselors and mental health professionals who understand the cultural context and can provide more empathetic care.

Cultural Competence Training: Regular training for all school staff on cultural competence to ensure they are equipped to address the specific needs of **African American** students without bias or misunderstanding.

2. Curriculum Reform

Incorporate African American History: Develop a curriculum that includes comprehensive and accurate **African American** history, which can help students understand their identity and reduce feelings of alienation.

Mental Health Education: Integrate mental health education into the curriculum, focusing on destigmatizing mental health issues and providing coping strategies, particularly in communities of color.

Improving the Educational System



3. Safe Spaces and Support Groups

Create Safe Spaces: Establish designated safe spaces within schools where **African American** students can discuss issues related to race, mental health, and personal challenges without judgment.

Peer Support Groups: Facilitate peer support groups led by trained facilitators where students can share experiences and support each other in a structured environment.

4. Parental and Community Engagement

Family Workshops: Offer workshops for **African American** families on mental health, helping to bridge the gap between school initiatives and home support.

Community Partnerships: Collaborate with local **African American** organizations and mental health providers to create a network of support for students outside of school.

Improving the Educational System



5. Policy and Structural Changes

- ***Anti-Racism Policies***: Implement and enforce anti-racism policies within schools to protect students from discrimination and microaggressions that can impact their mental health.
- ***Mental Health Funding***: Advocate for increased funding for school-based mental health services to ensure all students have the necessary care.

6. Data and Research

- ***Conduct Research***: Schools and districts should collect and analyze data on the mental health of **African American** students to identify trends, needs, and the effectiveness of interventions.
- ***Tailored Interventions***: Use research findings to develop and implement interventions tailored specifically to the needs of **African American** students.

These reforms, if implemented, can help create an educational environment that not only acknowledges but actively supports the mental health and well-being of African American students.

References



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National Coalition Against Domestic Violence
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THANK YOU!



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“Breaking the Silence”