

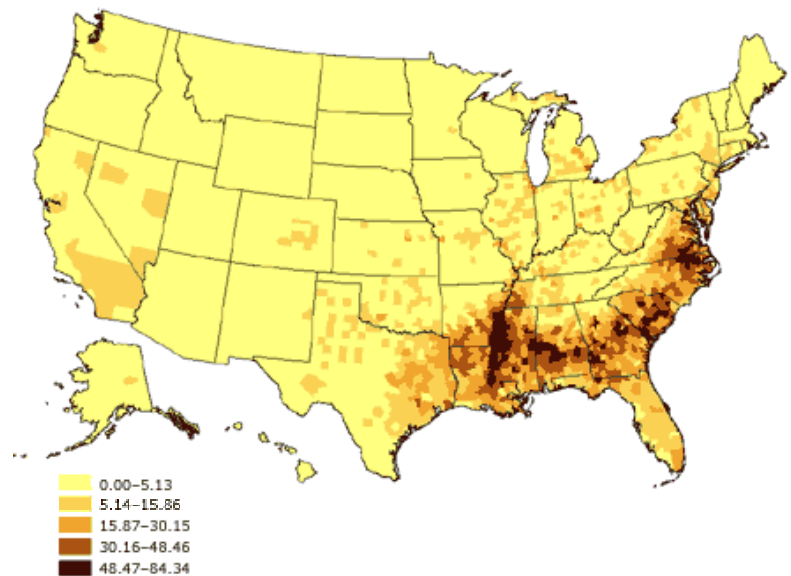


Mental Health Disparities: African Americans

Population: African Americans

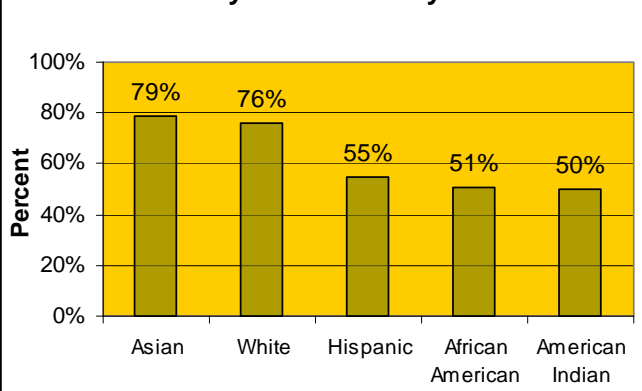
- Make up about 13% of the US population.
- About 30 percent of black households are headed by a woman with no husband present, compared with about 9 percent of white households.(1)
- Median income of black households is less than 2/3 of the median income of non-Hispanic white households. (2)
- About 25% of blacks live below the poverty level compared to about 8% of non-Hispanic whites. (2)
- More than 20% of African Americans are without health insurance compared to 11% of whites (2)
- Death rate for African Americans is higher than Whites for heart diseases, stroke, cancer, asthma, influenza and pneumonia, diabetes, HIV/AIDS, and homicide. (2.5)
- African American communities across the US are more culturally diverse now than at any other time in history with increasing numbers of immigrants from African nations, the Caribbean, Central America, and other countries.

Percentage of African American Adults



Source: CDC/US Census, 2000

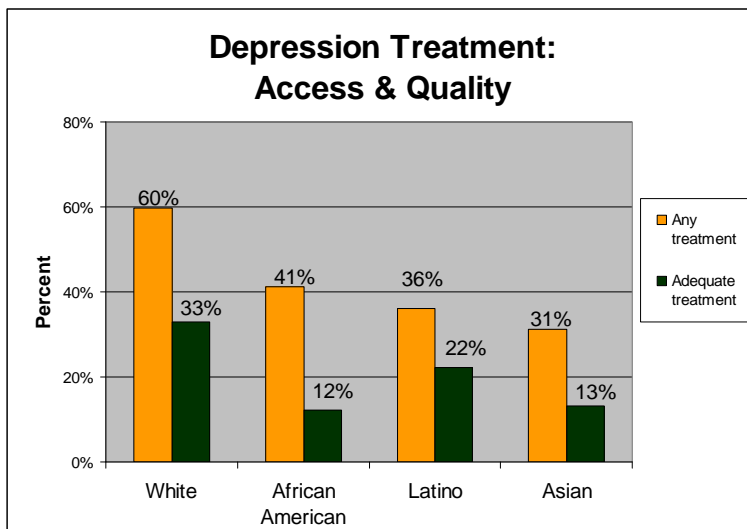
High School Graduation Rates
by Race/Ethnicity



Source: EPE Research Center, 2006

Mental Health Status, Use of Services, and Disparities

- Rates of mental illnesses in African Americans are similar to those of the general population. However, there are differences in some specific disorders and there are disparities in mental health care. African Americans receive less care and poorer quality care and often lack access to culturally competent care. (3)
- Rates of depression among African Americans (10%) and Afro-Caribbeans (13%) were lower than those of White Americans (18%). However, depression



Source: Alegria et al. Disparity in Depression Treatment Among Racial and Ethnic Minority Populations in the United States. *Psychiatric Services*. Nov 2008, vol 59 no 11.

- Compared to whites with the same symptoms, African Americans are more frequently diagnosed with schizophrenia and less frequently diagnosed with mood disorders. Differences in how African Americans express symptoms of emotional distress may contribute to misdiagnosis. (3)
- Differences in the way disorder are expressed, for example, with depression, African Americans are more likely to report somatic complaints and sleep and appetite changes; whites are more likely to report cognitive disturbance, anxiety, and core depressive feelings (10)
- Physician patient communication differs for African Americans and whites. One study found that physicians were 23% more verbally dominant and engaged in 33% less patient-centered communication with African American patients than with white patients. (11)
- Disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system –10% of African American men between ages 18 to 34 were in prison in 2005 (3 times the rate of Hispanic men and 7 times that of white men) (12). A Bureau of Justice study found that more than half of all inmates have mental health problems and an estimated 7 to 20 % have serious mental illness. (13 & 14)

is more chronic and disabling in blacks than among non-Hispanic whites. (4 & 5)

- The rate of alcohol use and binge alcohol use were lower for blacks than the national average (44% vs. 55% and 22% vs 25%). The rate of illicit drug use among blacks is slightly higher than the national average (10% vs 8%). (6)
- Compared to whites, African Americans are
 - less likely to receive guideline-consistent care
 - included in research less frequently
 - more likely to use emergency rooms or primary care (rather than mental health specialists) (7)
- Only one-in-three African Americans who need mental health care receives it. (8)
- Compared to the general population, African Americans are less likely to be offered either evidence-based medication therapy or psychotherapy. (9)

Barriers to Care

Despite recent efforts to improve mental health services for African Americans and other culturally diverse groups, barriers remain in access to and quality of care:

- Lack of providers of color
- Lack of culturally competent providers
- Lack of insurance, underinsurance
- Stigma associated with mental illness
- Distrust in the health care system

One recent study of blacks mental health consumers found a number of common barriers including: the importance of family privacy; lack of knowledge regarding available treatments; denial of mental health problems, and concerns about stigma, medications, and treatment; not receiving appropriate information about services or receiving inadequate; and dehumanizing services. Researchers concluded that is important to educate the general public, not just mental health consumers, about the nature of mental illness and available services. (15)

Responses/Strategies

- Conduct stigma awareness training with gatekeepers: faith community, primary care, community organizations
- Educate providers about mental health differences and disparities
- Increase awareness of mental health and chronic disease connection

- Increase awareness of availability of services
- Improve referral and follow up post jail and prison (i.e., community re-entry)
- Advocate for policies that promote social justice, equity and equality
- Comprehensive (including mental health and substance use disorders), affordable health coverage for all
- Focus on prevention, early intervention

Resources and References

Resources

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)

www.nami.org

Mental Health America (MHA)

www.nmha.org

National Medical Association

<http://www.nmanet.org/>

Black Psychiatrists of America (BPA)

www.blackpsych.org

Black Mental Health Alliance

www.blackmentalhealth.com

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

www.samhsa.gov

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