



THE
SAMUEL DUBOIS COOK
CENTER ON SOCIAL EQUITY

AT DUKE UNIVERSITY

Young Scholars Summer Research Institute

3rd Year Cohort

Research Papers

Summer 2017



Samuel DuBois Cook

The Samuel DuBois Cook Center on Social Equity (Cook Center) was named after Dr. Samuel DuBois Cook, a distinguished political scientist, scholar, educator, author, administrator, civil and human rights activist and public servant. Dr. Cook, a professor in the Duke University political science department became the first African-American to hold a regular and/or tenured faculty appointment at a predominantly white southern college or university. He went on to serve 22-and-a-half years as president of Dillard University in New Orleans.

Samuel DuBois Cook Center on Social Equity

The Duke University Samuel DuBois Cook Center on Social Equity is an interdisciplinary research center within Trinity School of Arts and Sciences that is comprised of faculty and scholars from across Duke and a diverse international group of affiliated universities, research centers and non-governmental organizations. Its mission is to promote equity, across all domains of human interactions, through interdisciplinary research, teaching, partnerships, policy, and practice. The Cook Center seeks to employ the innovative use of new and existing data, develop human capital, incorporate stakeholder voices through civic engagement, create viable collaborations, and engender equity-driven policy and social transformation at the local, national and international levels.

Young Scholars Summer Research Institute

The Young Scholars Summer Research Institute is sponsored by the Samuel DuBois Cook Center on Social Equity at Duke University in partnership with Durham Public Schools (DPS) in Durham, North Carolina. It is a three-week program that provides middle and high-school students enrolled in DPS with training to enhance their writing, research and presentation skills. In keeping with the Samuel DuBois Cook Center's central mission as a community of scholars engaged in the study of the causes and consequences of inequality, program participants will be exposed to curriculum related to the economic, political, social, and cultural dimensions of inequality.

During the Young Scholars Summer Research Institute, students receive instruction from distinguished middle and high-school teachers, university professors, and leaders from community organizations. The program's main focus is on the development of the students' research, writing, presentation and critical-inquiry skills, culminating in a capstone presentation of the student's research topic and findings before institute peers, university scholars, and Durham community members.

Some Secrets Shouldn't Be Kept: The Continuous Struggle of Mental Health in the African American Community

By: Kennedy Ruff

Abstract

The purpose of this research paper is to bring awareness to the different factors contributing to the issue of mental health in the black community. The three research questions asked for this particular topic are one, what are some social, occupational, economic stigmas African Americans face with mental health and how does this affect them? Two, what role does culture play in the African American community when dealing with mental health? Lastly, what are the impacts of mental health on the African American community? In this research paper I go over the racial discriminations in mental health, how the lack of knowledge, faith and community, social stigmas, occupational and economic stigmas of mental health affect the African American community. The conclusions that were made from this research paper were that in the African American community there needs to be: more awareness of mental health; bring more awareness to cultural competence to the medical professionals for better treatment for minorities; while faith is good to have it should not be an option for treatment; and lastly there should be more support in jobs for those dealing with mental illnesses.

Introduction

Background:

Mental health constitutes a person's emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how people think, feel, and act, as well as handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. Mental health is important for one's happiness and wellbeing. 1 in 5 adults suffer from a

mental health illness.¹ 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.²

Thesis Statement:

African Americans are less likely to seek treatment for a number of reasons including lack of mental health knowledge, the social stigmas attached to mental health, the role of faith in the African American community, and occupational and economic stigmas.³ The aim of this paper is to show how the lack of access to mental health services and the cultural, social, occupational, and economic stigma affects mental health in the African American community.

Research Questions:

The research questions for this paper are the following:

1. What are some social, occupational, economic stigmas African Americans face with mental health and how does this affect them?
2. What role does culture play in the African American community when dealing with mental health?
3. What are the impacts of mental health on the African American community?

Terminology

There are some vocabulary words that need to be defined that will be used throughout this research paper. *Cultural competence* is a doctor's ability to recognize and understand the role culture (yours and the doctor's) plays in treatment and to adapt to this reality to meet your

¹ Amanda Wang, "National Alliance on Mental Illness," *National Alliance on Mental Illness*, 2017, July 7 2017. <https://www.nami.org/Find-Support/Diverse-Communities/African-Americans>

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

needs.⁴ *Culture* is a person's belief, norms, values, and language.⁵ An example of culture in the mental health community is that it is good to take pills to get better but to some ethnicities, taking pills is a sign of weakness: that is what they grew up learning and knowing. *Social stigmas* are negative views from someone because you have a different characteristic that is seen as a disadvantage. For instance, if a movie depicts a character who has schizophrenia as violent, its audience will subconsciously start perceiving all schizophrenics as violent. That also ties in with mental health stigma. *Mental health stigma* is where there is a negative view or opinion on someone who has a mental illness.

Methodology

I referred to materials from the National Alliance on Mental Health, including statistics about African Americans in mental health, as well as the factors that contributed to the increase of mental health issues in the African American community. World Psychiatry, which is a World Journal of the Psychiatric Association, researched about how social stigmas, perception of mental health, and limited employment affects how African Americans were able to survive and be successful. The Public Broadcasting System referred to how African Americans have a hard time finding jobs, falling into homelessness, and struggling where they are employed. Using many articles and journals like those above I developed a research paper that shows how many factors contribute to the rising mental illness issue in the African American community.

⁴ "Cultural Competence in Health Care: Is it important for people with chronic conditions?" Health Policy Institute | Georgetown University. February 2004. Accessed July 27, 2017. <https://hpi.georgetown.edu/agingsociety/pubhtml/cultural/cultural.html>.

⁵ Culture. Dictionary.com. *Dictionary.com Unabridged*. Random House, Inc. July 27, 2017. <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/culture>

Data Analysis

The remaining portions of this paper will include the five factors that influence mental health in the African American community: microaggressions, lack of mental health knowledge, faith, social stigmas, and lastly the occupational and economic stigmas. The first section of this paper will talk about microaggressions, which play a part in good mental health because this is a form of racism that is present every day. Misdiagnosis and lack of cultural competence will be highlighted in the section on lack of knowledge. “Faith and community” will discuss how you interact with people who have a mental illness, as well as discussing how religion plays a part in African Americans lives when dealing with the different illnesses. “Social stigma” includes the many stereotypes coming from the media and the different stigmatizing attitudes that people have of the mentally ill. Lastly “occupational and economic stigma” will cover how the hardship of finding and keeping a job affects treatment options and ultimately their lives. These five factors influence mental health in African Americans communities to either be positive or negative because they all contribute to being like your support team.

Microaggressions

A form of racism that is experienced on a day to day basis is called microaggression. Microaggressions are verbal, behavioral, and social communications that send a negative or hostile message to a particular group.⁶ Microaggressions may result in feelings of powerlessness, invisibility, forced compliance, and loss of integrity.⁷ Experiencing significant amounts of

⁶ "Racism." GoodTherapy.org Therapy Blog. August 20, 2015. Accessed July 27, 2017.
<http://www.goodtherapy.org/blog/psychpedia/racism>.

⁷ Jennifer M. Gómez, “Microaggressions and the Enduring Mental Health Disparity: Black Americans at Risk for Institutional Betrayal” *Journal of Black Psychology* 2015 Accessed July 7 2017
<http://dynamic.uoregon.edu/jjf/institutionalbetrayal/gomez2015.pdf>

discrimination over time can lead to changes in the way the brain processes information, disrupting, for example, the regions involved in planning and decision-making.⁸ The continuous stress caused from microaggression increases the risk of many conditions including depression, colds, seasonal illnesses, heart disease, and cancer.⁹ Chronic stress can result in serious health conditions including anxiety, insomnia, muscle pain, high blood pressure and a weakened immune system.¹⁰

Lack of Mental Health Knowledge

Misdiagnosis or inadequate treatment can lead to the reluctance to consult a health professional. What contributes to the vast number of misdiagnoses in the African American community is the lack of cultural competence in mental health professionals. It is shown that African American women describe their depression symptoms as bodily pain, but if medical professionals are not culturally competent they might not recognize or realize those types of symptoms and misdiagnose the patient's.¹¹ It is well documented that racial and ethnic minorities in the United States are less likely than whites to seek mental health treatment, which largely accounts for their under-representation in most mental health services.¹² Many African Americans also prefer counseling to drug therapy because their concerns revolve around side

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ "Understanding Chronic Stress." American Psychological Association. 2013. Accessed July 27, 2017. <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/understanding-chronic-stress.aspx>.

¹¹ Amanda Wang, "National Alliance on Mental Illness," *National Alliance on Mental Illness, 2017, July 7 2017*. <https://www.nami.org/Find-Support/Diverse-Communities/African-Americans>

¹² Ibid.

effects, effectiveness, and addiction potential of medications.¹³ African Americans might stop going to a health professional if the latter is not African American, because they don't feel like they have that connection or understanding.¹⁴ Being uninformed about mental health issues, treatments, or just mental health in general causes the idea of mental health being a personal weakness. When African Americans do get mental illnesses and they feel it is some form of a wrongdoing, dealing with their belief, they tend to be reluctant to seek medical help because of the social stigmas attached to mental health.¹⁵

Faith

Beliefs, dealing with the religion they believe in, enable African Americans to only confide in their faith instead of going to get treatment or get awareness of a growing mental illness.¹⁶ As African Americans are more likely to use religion to make sense of their depressive symptoms, they will use church-based supports for coping. African Americans are more likely to attend church and receive informal supports from church-based networks when experiencing distress.¹⁷

¹³ Office of the Surgeon General (US). "Chapter 2 Culture Counts: The Influence of Culture and Society on Mental Health." *Mental Health: Culture, Race, and Ethnicity: A Supplement to Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General*. August 2001. Accessed July 27, 2017. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK44249/>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Johnson, Robert. "Cultural Competence in Health Care: Is it important for people with chronic conditions?" Health Policy Institute | Georgetown University. February 2004. Accessed July 26, 2017. <https://hpi.georgetown.edu/agingociety/pubhtml/cultural/cultural.html>.

¹⁶ Amanda Wang, "National Alliance on Mental Illness," *National Alliance on Mental Illness, 2017, July 7 2017*. <https://www.nami.org/Find-Support/Diverse-Communities/African-Americans>

¹⁷ Bryant, Keneshia, Tiffany Haynes, Karen Hye-cheon Kim Yeary, Nancy Greer-Williams, and Mary Hartwig. "A Rural African American Faith Community's Solutions to Depression Disparities." *Public health nursing* (Boston, Mass.). September 2, 2014. Accessed July 27, 2017. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4250221/>.

Stigmas in Mental Health

Typically, stigma takes the form of stereotyping, distrust, fear, or avoidance and can negatively impact pursuit of treatment, employment and income, self-worth, and families. Individuals with mental illness are commonly labelled as a result of their appearance, behavior, treatment, socio-economic status.¹⁸ Individuals with mental illness are stereotyped as dangerous, unpredictable, and as weak-willed. Along with the stigma faced by the individual, associative stigma can impact the family and friends of that person.¹⁹ Stigmatizing views about mental illness are not limited to uninformed members of the general public; even well-trained professionals from most mental health disciplines subscribe to stereotypes about mental illness.²⁰ The stakes can be especially high when black men with mental illness interact with the police. Police are not equipped to appropriately manage people with mental illness. Police behaviors often serve to incite and exacerbate, rather than de-escalate, the exhibited behavioral symptoms of mental illness, particularly among those who are psychotic or with poor impulse control.²¹

Media analyses of film and print have identified three perceptions of mental health: people with mental illness are homicidal maniacs who need to be feared; they have childlike perceptions of the world that should be marveled; or they are responsible for their illness because they have weak character. After being exposed to such movies, people tend to have the following

¹⁸ David Whalen, "The Stigma Associated with Mental Illness", *Canadian Mental Health Association, 2006* Accessed July 27 2017 <http://www.cmhanl.ca/pdf/Stigma.pdf>.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Bryant, Keneshia, Tiffany Haynes, Karen Hye-cheon Kim Yeary, Nancy Greer-Williams, and Mary Hartwig. "A Rural African American Faith Community's Solutions to Depression Disparities." Public health nursing (Boston, Mass.). September 2, 2014. Accessed July 27, 2017. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4250221/>.

²¹ Ibid.

reactions: fear and exclusion: persons with severe mental illness should be feared and, therefore, be kept out of most communities; authoritarianism: persons with severe mental illness are irresponsible, so life decisions should be made by others; and benevolence: persons with severe mental illness are childlike and need to be cared for. Although stigmatizing attitudes are not limited to mental illness, the public seems to disapprove persons with psychiatric disabilities significantly more than persons with related conditions such as physical illness.²²

Occupational and Economic Stigma

Employment can have two distinct effects on mental health. Firstly individuals value the opportunities offered by employment and this helps maintaining their well-being. It also provides social status and identity, a sense of achievement and a means of structuring one's time. Fear of stigma and rejection by prospective employers may undermine confidence and result in not being successful on job interviews.²³ Employers cannot find the help they need to keep people with mental health problems on the job and social services don't do enough to stop the unemployed from falling into depression. Work placement services are ill-prepared to assist clients with a mental illness because their profiling tools either do not identify mental illness as a barrier to the job market or they underestimate the employment potential of those with a diagnosed mental disorder.²⁴ In the U.S., people with a mental illness are two to three times more likely to be unemployed, and their employment rate is 15 percentage points lower than for those without

²² Bryant, Keneshia, Tiffany Haynes, Karen Hye-cheon Kim Yeary, Nancy Greer-Williams, and Mary Hartwig. "A Rural African American Faith Community's Solutions to Depression Disparities." Public health nursing (Boston, Mass.). September 2, 2014. Accessed July 27, 2017. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4250221/>.

²³ David McDaid, Martin Knapp Helena Medeiros, "Employment and mental health: Assessing the economic impact and the case for intervention" *Personal Social Services Research Unit* 2007 Accessed July 27 2017 [http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/4236/1/MHEEN_policy_briefs_5_Employment\(LSERO\).pdf](http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/4236/1/MHEEN_policy_briefs_5_Employment(LSERO).pdf).

²⁴ Ibid.

mental health problems. They are also more likely to call-in sick, often for longer periods, and to underperform at work.²⁵ In the U.S., the income of people with severe mental health problems is almost three times more likely than average to fall below the poverty threshold.²⁶

Conclusion

Mental health is a growing subject to research, so research is changing more and more. The conclusions that was made from this research paper was that in the African American community there needs to be: more awareness of mental health, bring more awareness to cultural competence to the medical professionals for better treatment for minorities, faith is good to have but should not be an option for treatment, and occupational and economic stance there should be more support in jobs for those dealing with mental illnesses. I did not look at how location has a factor in mental health or what some solutions would be to close the gap in treatment. Some solutions that can help with the vast numbers of African Americans with some sort of mental health issue are to bring more awareness to people about the importance of treatment. When they have the knowledge of treatment then they can know the right diagnosis so they won't be misdiagnosed or mistreated. Cultural competence in the health field needs to also have more awareness because it affects the treatment opportunities for African Americans. For occupational and economic stigma one thing is to inform friends and family about mental health and to not trust everything in the media without doing research to back up what is being discussed.

²⁵ Christopher Prinz. "How Your Mental Health May Be Impacting Your Career." PBS. June 28, 2013. Accessed July 27, 2017. <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/how-mental-health-impacts-us-workers/>

²⁶ Ibid.

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