

# Increasing Mental Health Literacy in the African American Community

Collaborations  
Between Mental  
Health Professionals  
and the Black  
Church

Brianna Simmons  
Marymount University

# Mental Illness

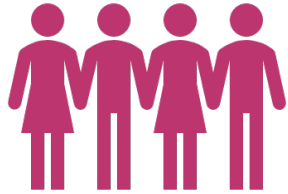
- ▶ Prevalent in the US
  - ▶ 61.5 million adult Americans affected
- ▶ Only half receive medical treatment
  - ▶ Discrepancy → racial communities
  - ▶ 9% of African Americans seek professional treatment



# What Causes This Discrepancy?

- ▶ Forms of coping utilized
  - ▶ Traditional
    - ▶ Psychiatry and Psychological Therapy
      - ▶ Multiple sessions
      - ▶ Prescribed medication
      - ▶ Most utilized by Caucasians
  - ▶ Non-Traditional
    - ▶ Clerical/Pastoral Counseling
      - ▶ Individual meetings with pastor
      - ▶ Talk therapy with congregants
      - ▶ Most utilized by African Americans

# Barriers



## Cultural/Community-Level

Stigma  
Socioeconomic Status



## Individual/Psychological

Trust  
Cultural Sensitivity

## Cultural/Community- Level Barriers

### Stigma

- Labeling
- Abandonment

### Socioeconomic Status

- Affordability
- Accessibility

# Trust

- Tuskegee experiment  
1932-1972

# Cultural Sensitivity

- Stereotypes

Individual/Psychological  
Barriers

# What Do African Americans Utilize for Their Mental Distress?

- ▶ The Black Church
  - ▶ Pillar of refuge and strength
  - ▶ African Americans tend to identify as being religious individuals
  - ▶ Place for religious, spiritual, communal and social needs
  - ▶ Structure controlled by African Americans



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# Possible Solutions?



Considering the role of both White and African American psychologists



Recognizing the role of the Black Church, religiosity, and spirituality in African Americans



Creating a collaboration between the Black Church and mental health professionals



# Target 1: Assess Mental Health Professionals

## Educating Caucasian Psychologists

- Consider the unique experiences of African Americans
- Self-examine cultural biases
- Capitalize on strengths

## Race-Pairing in Therapy

- Preferred among African Americans
- Cultural commonalities
- Increased engagement and consistency

## Community Programming

- Assess the needs of the community
- Implement culture-specific community engagement



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## Target 2: Assess the Black Church and Black Church Leaders

- ▶ How do levels of religiosity and spirituality influence the use of mental health services?
  - ▶ Affects their utilization and referral
  - ▶ Church leaders attendance & seeking mental health services
  - ▶ More religious & seeking mental health services

# Target 3: The Collaboration



## Will this work?

Yes! It has been done before with physical health.

Churches have even developed nursing ministries and created community health days



## Mental Health Collaboration

Mental health professionals should consider, evaluate, and be aware of the fear, guilt, and mistrust

They do not have to be well-versed in the religious teachings or biblical scripture

They do need to understand the important role of religion

They should feel comfortable consulting or referring to clergy members when appropriate

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