

# Mental illness: The silent killer

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 higher than the burden of disease associated with all forms of cancer. It is estimated that one in every five Americans will experience a mental illness at some point during their lives. In general, persons of color endure a greater burden from unmet mental health needs, which can result in unnecessary suffering and impact overall health and productivity. Alarmingly, suicides among African American youth ages 10-14 years are increasing at a rate nearly double the rate of increase among white youth of the same age.

The time could not be more appropriate to think seriously about our families and community members. We cannot afford to remain silent on an issue that is affecting our families and community on a

daily basis. While many questions remain, an inescapable question is, What does it take to grow our investment in mental health awareness regardless of age, race, gender, socioeconomic status, or place of origin?

Moving to action for improving psychological health

Improving the psychological health and well-being of family and community members should be priority in the African-American community. So why are we resistant to increasing our conversations about this personal health and public health issue? Action-oriented thinking will ask what we can do now for the health of the future to help promote family and community awareness of mental illness. First, we must be clear that family and community attitudes and beliefs about mental health

must be adjusted in order to ensure that all in our community get the care they need. There are action-oriented strategies we can use to increase mental health awareness and mental health literacy. A few steps you can take include:

1. Make efforts to learn about the symptoms of common psychological conditions, such as depression and anxiety.
2. Pay attention your own emotional well being and notice the situations that trigger stressful feelings and negative emotions.
3. Use characters and situations from movies and television to stimulate and advance family awareness and conversations about psychological health.
4. Challenge mental illness stigma by encouraging open discussions about feelings, emotions, and psychological well-being.

5. Add mental health awareness to church ministries.
6. Avoid the use of language that describes mental illness in derogatory terms.
7. Remember that mental illness does not define an individual.
8. Understand that disruptive behavior in school by children could be related to underlying mental distress. Children experience psychological distress also.
9. If you are experiencing psychological distress, seek care.

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For more information or to learn about health resources, call the Maya Angelou Research Center on Minority Health at (336) 713-7578.

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# Cost keeps college out of reach for many U.S. minority students

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 for example, around 7 percent of its student population is black.

"Cost is becoming a bigger and bigger barrier for that constituency," said Byron Wiley, director of access and equity at Clemson.

Wiley said the increase in tuition coupled with few need-based financial aid options is hurting the university's efforts to recruit more black students.

"A lot of kids I work with would love to come here," said Levon Kirkland, Clemson's coordinator of minority recruitment initiatives. "It's always heartbreaking when the reason they don't come is the financial reason."

Among Clemson's efforts to attract more black students are summer programs, such as an SAT workshop aimed at top minority students and a science and engineering summer camp for rising eighth-grade girls from diverse backgrounds.

Lander University in Greenwood has had greater success diversifying its student population since an initiative pushed by then-president Larry Jackson when Lander became a public university in 1973, said Charlotte Cabri, a Lander spokeswoman.

At Lander, 24 percent of the students are black.

"It was easy to get involved," said Anna Pinck-

ney, a 2005 graduate working in the school's admissions office. "It wasn't about black and white. Each organization involved everyone from every type of culture."

In South Carolina, total college enrollment rose between 2001 and 2005 and black enrollment rose at the state's teaching, two-year regional and technical colleges, according to the state Commission on Higher Education.

But the percentage of black students decreased at the state's research universities: Clemson, the University of South Carolina and the Medical University of South Carolina.

"We are making progress, although it is somewhat eas-

ier to make that progress in the high-growth and lower-cost institutions," said Gail Morrison, interim executive director of the state Commission on Higher Education.

"We have a tremendous need to help students coming from impoverished backgrounds," Morrison said. "Unfortunately in South Carolina, poverty is often linked to race."

That means those students likely will need scholarships.

Of \$276.2 million in state scholarships and grants for the 2006-07 academic year, just \$50.3 million were provided for need-based programs, according to state Commission on Higher Education figures. The remaining \$225.9 million went to merit-based programs.

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# Rats in your home? Don't shriek

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 "Compared to many other rodent species, such as mice and gerbils, rats are highly social creatures," he explains. They're also smarter than you think.

"Experimental investigation of rat cognition has found that they are very trainable and have excellent memory, especially for spatial and odor information," says Blaisdell. "They are also good at timing events, such as learning when a second event will follow a first. In fact, they may even share some striking cognitive abilities with humans—though at a rudimentary level, such as reasoning about cause and effect, and expressing knowledge about what they do and do not know."

Rats also share our ability

to be life-long learners. Their varied diet in the wild means that they can take advantage of many different food sources (and that they enjoy the Froot Loops that Blaisdell uses as a reward in some of his research).

Rats will sample small bits of new food to see if they're safe—unless they can check out what's on a friend's plate. "If they smell a novel food on the breath of another rat, they will immediately incorporate that novel food into their own diet."

Still, brains aren't everything, and rats are clearly loved mainly for their affectionate nature. The only disadvantage mentioned repeatedly was their short lifespan.

"However, you also must understand that despite a lifespan of only 2-3 years, rats live that time to the fullest," says Somjen. "They offer complete and utter love, are hilariously funny creatures that want nothing more than to be with you."

# Fewer see kids as key to marriage

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 good marriage. Just 41 percent said so in the new Pew survey.

Chore-sharing was cited as very important by 62 percent of respondents, up from 47 percent in 1990.

The survey also found that, by a margin of nearly 3-to-1, Americans say the main purpose of marriage is the "mutual happiness and fulfillment" of adults rather than the "bearing and raising of children."

The survey's findings buttress concerns expressed by numerous scholars and family-policy experts, among them Barbara Dafoe Whitehead of Rutgers University's National Marriage Project.

"The popular culture is increasingly oriented to fulfilling the X-rated fantasies and desires of adults," she wrote in a recent report.

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