

Mental Health of Black MSM

Elevated degrees of depressive mood and anxiety disorders have been found among African American men who have sex with men (MSM) in comparison to European American MSM or heterosexual African American men (Richardson, Myers, Bing, & Satz, 1997). Features that may explain this elevated risk include racist and heterosexist stress (Crawford, Allison, Zamboni, & Soto, 2002). Regrettably, experiences of oppression and stigmatization, including blocked access to resources, remain enduring experiences in the lives of many African Americans. Also, MSM are sexually marginalized, and like other marginalized groups, they often face experiences of discrimination.

MSM report more frequent experiences with discrimination, in terms of both discrete events and everyday offenses in comparison with heterosexual men (Cochran, 2001). In addition to discrimination, African American MSM also often fall victim to homophobic violence, sometimes a symptom of troubling conceptions of black masculinities. Homophobia functions as a key component of the widespread hegemonic construction of masculinity in the US (Ward, 2005). Mainstream notions of masculinity in US society are innately heterosexist and homophobic (Kimmel, 1994).

- 77% of white men reported that they were out to their parents, compared to 51% of Asian/Pacific Islander men, 62% of African American men, 69% of Latinos, and 71% of men identifying as other races (Groves, Bimbi, Nanin, & Parsons, 2006).
- Although adolescence, in general, is a high-risk developmental stage for suicide attempts, sexually marginalized youth also seem to be a particularly vulnerable group ("National strategy for suicide prevention: Goals and objectives for action", 2001).

Mental Illness Prevalence Among Black Men

- Blacks are estimated to have an average depression prevalence rate of 25.9% compared to 16.5% among whites (Frerichs, Aneshensel, & Clark, 1981).
- Between 1980 and 1995, the suicide rate among African Americans ages 10-14 increased 233%, whereas the rate for whites increased 120% ("Mental health: Culture, race, and ethnicity - a supplement to mental health: A report of the surgeon general", 2001).
- 2/3 of black males living in urban areas meet the criteria for PTSD a month after receiving a violent injury (Rich, 2005).

Mental Illness Prevalence Among MSM

- As compared with heterosexual men, MSM seem to be at increased risk for major depression and panic attacks (Cochran & Mays, 2000).
- MSM are 3 times more likely to meet criteria for major depression and 4.7 times more likely to meet criteria for a panic disorder than are heterosexual men (Cochran, Sullivan, & Mays, 2003).
- MSM are 5 times more likely to have attempted suicide than heterosexuals (Cochran & Mays, 2000).
- 1 in 5 MSM have a lifetime history of an affective disorder, chiefly recurrent depression (Cochran & Mays, 2000).

Discrimination (Mays & Cochran, 2001)

- ¾ of MSM indicated having ever experienced discrimination.
- 42% of MSM credited lifetime discrimination to their sexual orientation, in whole or part.

Attitudes & Beliefs: Homophobia & Heterosexism

- A national survey administered by Herek and Glunt (1993) reported that 64% of respondents agreed that “homosexual behavior between two men is just plain wrong,” and 50% agreed with the statement, “I believe homosexuals are disgusting” (Herek & Glunt, 1993).
- A Newsweek poll indicated that approximately 50% of respondents believed homosexuality is a sin, and nearly 33% in another survey believed it to be a mental illness.

Relationships (Peplau, Cochran, & Mays, 1998)

- African American gay couples indicated that they chose their current partner primarily for inner attributes (intelligence, personality, cultural sophistication, spiritual energy), secondarily for physical attributes (sexual ability, ethnicity, physical attractiveness), and least of all for instrumental resources (type of job, type of home, income, friends).
- Since their current relationship began, 2/3 of a sample of coupled African American gay men indicated that they had had sex with someone other than their primary partner.

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