Maryland’s 31st Suicide Prevention Conference
Martin’s West, Baltimore, Maryland
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Assessing Mental Health Needs in the Black Church

Presenters
William T. Powell
Naomi B. Powell
Donna H. Barnes, PhD
Assessing Mental Health Needs in the Black Church

- Learning Objectives –

• How to Identify Specific Mental Health Needs of Church Congregations

• How to Identify Specific Barriers to Obtaining Mental Health Services

• Identify Cultural and Faith Attitudes That May Relate to Mental Health Issues
What is the Black Church?

What is the true nature and mission of the Black Church? As a community formed in the memory of Jesus Christ and informed by the gospels, what is it that makes it a faithful and authentic witness, and what exactly is it called to do? Indeed, all Christian communities must ask and try to answer that question. From the fledgling communities behind the gospels to the classic debates of Nicea and Chalcedon through the Reformation until now, Christology and ecclesiology have always been done together so that those who are informed by a memory of Jesus must wrestle simultaneously with the implications of that memory for their own mission. That is the church’s burden.

Rafael G. Warnock
Ebenezer Baptist Church
The Black Church!

Importance of religion in one's life among blacks

% of blacks who say religion is...

100%

75%

0%

Very important

16%

Somewhat important

5%

Not too important

4%

Not at all important

1%

Don't know

PEW RESEARCH CENTER
Black Church Attendance – A Demographic Comparison

Attendance at religious services by race/ethnicity (2014)
% of adults who attend religious services...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Racial and ethnic composition</th>
<th>At least once a week</th>
<th>Once or twice a month/a few times a year</th>
<th>Seldom/never</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other/Mixed</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5 facts about the religious lives of African Americans
5 facts about the religious lives of African Americans

• 1 Roughly eight-in-ten (79%) African Americans self-identify as Christian, as do seven-in-ten whites and 77% of Latinos, according to Pew Research Center’s 2014 Religious Landscape Study.

• 2 The first predominantly black denominations in the U.S. were founded in the late 18th century, some by free black people.

• 3 African Americans are more religious than whites and Latinos by many measures of religious commitment.

• 4 The share of African Americans who identify as religiously unaffiliated has increased in recent years, mirroring national trends.

• 5 Older African Americans are more likely than younger black adults to be associated with historically black Protestant churches.
Is Mental Health an Issue for the Black Church to Consider?

• Yes_____

• No_____

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What Is Mental Health?

- Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. Mental health is important at every stage of life, from childhood and adolescence through adulthood.

- Faith and community leaders are often the first point of contact when individuals and families face mental health problems or traumatic events. In fact, in times of crisis, many will turn to trusted leaders in their communities before they turn to mental health professionals. When leaders know how to respond, they become significant assets to the overall health system.

MentalHealth.gov
Assessing Mental Health Needs in the Black Church

• African Americans have used the church as a place for mental health resources...

• The pastor has historically been used as a safe locus for receiving counseling...

• It is important for psychologists and clergy to collaborate on models to help parishioners with their mental health issues, whether through community-based interventions, training for pastors, or through referral resources.

Jessica Young Brown, PhD Staff Psychologist Virginia Commonwealth University
Adjunct Professor
Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology Virginia Union University
Assessing Mental Health Needs in the Black Church

Many churches provide financial assistance, transportation services and even health care screenings to their congregants. Unique factors such as locating and affording mental health services, trust, cultural attitudes and faith beliefs can be barriers to receiving mental health help. For this reason, the church, as part of the community, has to examine the total needs of its congregants before it can serve as an effective agent to help resolve community mental health issues.
Casual Inquiry vs. In-depth Analysis

**Casual**

**Serious**
Some Factors to Consider...

- Nature and Size of Church (Churches are not monolithic)
- Considerations of Privacy and Confidentiality
- Pros and Cons of Assessment Method
- How Will the Information Be Treated
How to Identify Specific Mental Health Needs of Church Congregations

**Query Methods**

Surveys
Focus Groups
Observations
Other

Yes or No,
Open-ended,
Likert Scale Questions (i.e., Agree, Somewhat Agree, Disagree...).

**Sample Assessment Questions:**

1. Do you consider yourself to have a mental health issue?

2. Do you believe people sometimes come to church experiencing depression, anxiety, or even thoughts of suicide?

3. Sometimes people visit church as a cry for help.
How to Identify Specific Barriers to Obtaining Mental Health Services

Query Methods

Surveys
Focus Groups
Observations
Other

Yes or No,
Open-ended,
Scale Questions (Agree, Somewhat Agree, Disagree...).

Sample Assessment Questions:

• 1. Persons with mental health issues probably do not have insurance for counseling or other treatment.

• 2. People feel comfortable talking to the pastor or other church leaders about mental health.

• 3. If people needed outside help, they would seek it.

• 4. People have trouble getting around due to transportation problems.
Identify Cultural and Faith Attitudes That May Relate to Mental Health Issues

Query Methods

Surveys
Focus Groups
Observations
Other

• Yes or No,
• Open-ended,
• Scale Questions (Agree, Somewhat Agree, Disagree...).

Sample Assessment Questions:

1. Circle all that best relate to the way you feel.
   a. Suffering can give you the opportunity to grow spiritually.
   b. If a person prays more, they will be cured.
   c. Persons with a mental illness are more violent.
   d. God never abandons those who suffer.
   e. Persons with mental illness in their families need the support of the faith community.
   f. Suicide is a sin and shows a lack of faith in God.
   g. Persons with a mental illness could just snap out of it, but they are too lazy.

2. Briefly describe your beliefs about what causes mental illnesses such as depression, schizophrenia, addictions, etc.?

3. Race and racial history play a role in mental health.
Post-Needs Assessment

We’ve Done Our Needs Assessment!

Now What?

- Mental Health Ministry
- Counseling and Referrals
- Workshops
- Resource Information
- Sermons
- Trainings
- Community Outreach
Thank you for your participation!!

Questions and Answers

William T. Powell

• Governor’s Commission on Suicide Prevention
• NOPCAS.org

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