

Depression and African Americans



Depression is one of the most common mental illnesses in the United States, but it's more likely to be under-recognized or misdiagnosed, or go untreated in African Americans. According to the [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health](#), African Americans are 20% more likely to report serious psychological distress than white Americans, but are also less likely to receive behavioral health treatment. African Americans living below the poverty line are also more likely to report psychological distress. Poverty is not only a risk factor for mental illness, but also a barrier to receiving care.

The lack of mental health treatment for those who need it can have devastating consequences. Untreated major depressive disorder can result in emotional, behavioral and health problems that seriously impact quality of life. Substance abuse, suicidal feelings and suicide attempts, self-destructive behavior, and medical problems such as heart disease are possible complications.

Treatment Considerations

Poverty, racism, stigma, judgment, lack of insurance, and lack of culturally competent clinicians can present barriers to mental health treatment.

“African Americans, like all people being treated, need to be assessed according to their individual experiences and not be stereotyped. A clear distinction must be made between stereotypes and culture, as all too often the two concepts are treated as if they were interchangeable with respect to the African American community,” states Vivian Carr Allen, LCSW, a clinician in [InterCommunity's Outpatient Adult Services](#). “This inaccuracy prevents individuals from being treated according to their unique circumstances and can even serve to perpetuate systemic discrimination and institutionalized racism - which can contribute to increased rates of depression in the African American community.



“While culture is an important factor to take into consideration when providing treatment, it must be done in the context of the individual's personal experiences. Putting too much emphasis on categorizing African Americans based on differences from other racial or ethnic groups - rather than actually paying attention to what is said as well as unsaid by a patient - can lead to misdiagnosis and ineffective treatment. More effort must be put forth towards understanding, education, outreach and accessible care in order to provide equal care for all.”

If you, or someone you know, is interested in addiction recovery services, primary care, or mental health care for children or adults, contact

InterCommunity. To receive services at any of our Hartford or East Hartford locations, please call 860-569-5900.

