

# Mental Health Challenges Facing African American Youth in Urban Communities



Presented by  
Laverne S. Williams, CSW  
Director of the PEWS (Promoting Emotional  
Wellness & Spirituality) Program



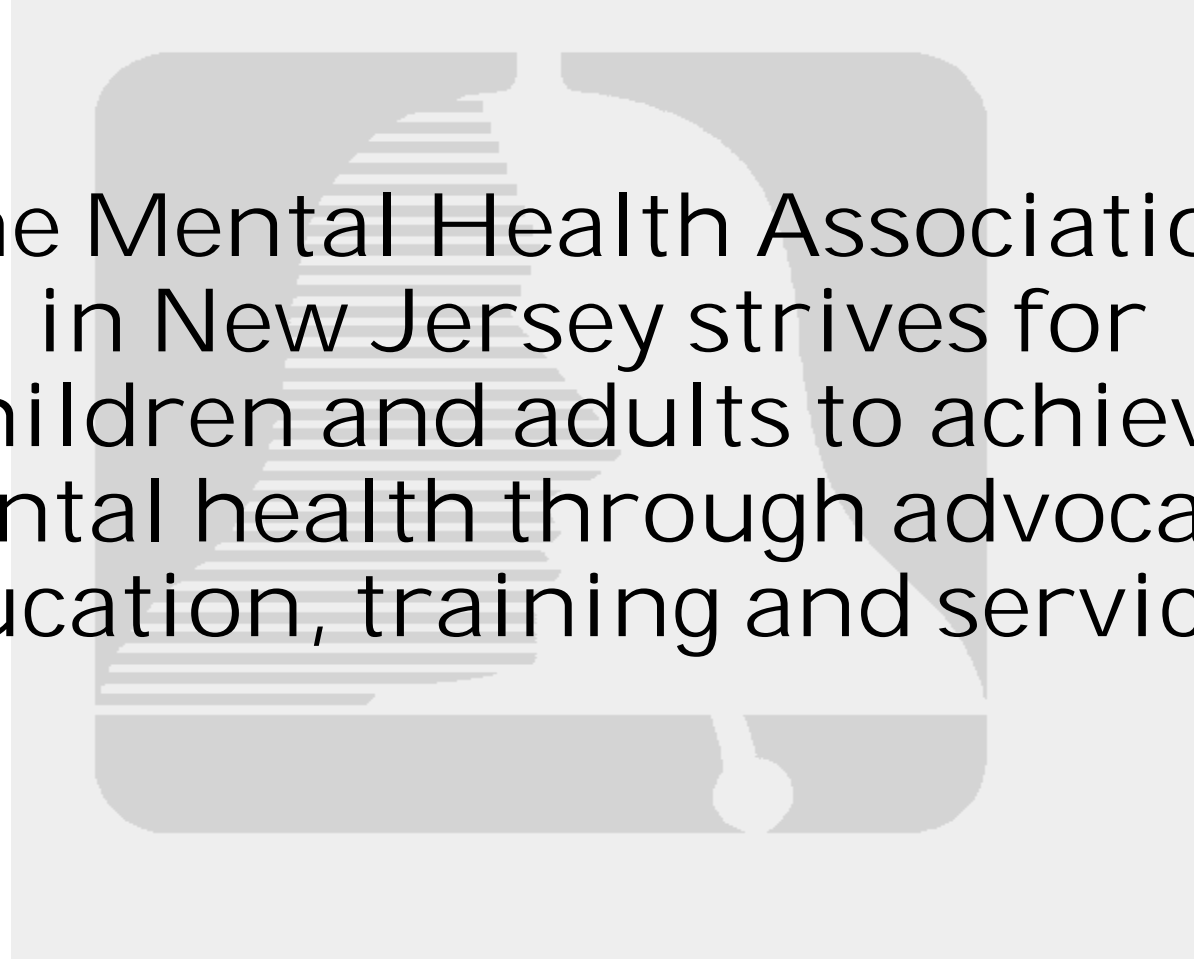
**Mental Health  
Association  
in New Jersey**



# Mission Statement



The Mental Health Association  
in New Jersey strives for  
children and adults to achieve  
mental health through advocacy,  
education, training and services.



# Agenda



- I. Myths & Common Misconceptions of Mental Illness
- II. Barriers To Treatment
- III. Psychological Challenges Facing Black Youths
- IV. Oral Communications to Counter Arguments
- V. Seven Key Principles of Resilience

# Program Objectives



Participants will be able to:

- I. Identify Stressors Unique to African American Youth
- II. Recognize Barriers to Seeking Treatment
- III. Study Oral Communications to Counter Arguments Against Mental Health Services
- IV. Increase Knowledge of Resiliency Concepts for Urban Youth

# Foundation



In April 2002, President Bush established the President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health to eliminate inequalities in mental health care.

After analyzing both the public and private mental health systems, the Commission released its final report: "Achieving the Promise, Transforming Mental Health Care in America" which revealed:

# Foundation cont.



Although racial and ethnic minority Americans are growing at a rapid rate, the mental health system has not kept pace with their diverse needs, often under-serving or inappropriately serving them.

It also has not integrated respect and understanding of the histories, traditions, beliefs, languages and value system of culturally diverse groups.

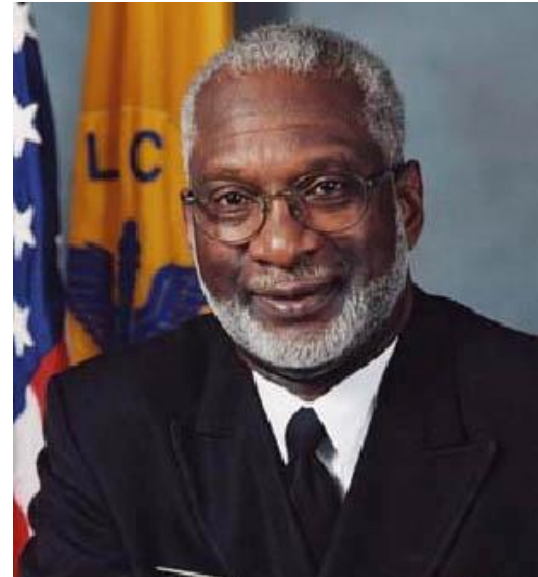
# Foundation cont.



While efforts to improve services for culturally diverse populations are currently underway, significant barriers still remain. As a result, American Indians, Alaska Natives, African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanics, Muslims and Pacific Islanders, have a disproportionately high burden of disability from mental disorders.

# Getting Help

Dr. David Satcher, the first Male African American Surgeon General stated:



*“Every person, regardless of race or ethnicity, should seek help if they have a mental health problem or symptoms of a mental disorder.”*

*(U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1996)*



# Video Clip



- [YouTube - "Driving While Black"](#)

## *True or False:*



Experiencing an emotional problem as a physical symptom is more common among communities of color than among whites.

*True!*



Communities of color are more likely to experience mental illness as physical symptoms. (Somatization)

*True or False:*



Young African  
American men have a  
lower rate of suicide  
than white men.

# *False!*



- Suicide rates for young black men are as high as those for young white men.
- From 1980 - 1995, the suicide rate among African Americans ages 10 to 14 increased by 233%.

(NMHA survey, 1996)

## *True or False:*



Getting tough with juvenile offenders by trying them in adult criminal courts reduces the likelihood that they will commit more crimes.

*False!*



Youths transferred to adult criminal court have significantly higher rates of re-offending and a greater likelihood of committing subsequent felonies than youths who remain in the juvenile justice system.

More likely to be victimized physically & sexually

## *True or False:*



In the 1990s, school violence affected mostly white students or students who attended suburban or rural schools.



*False!*



African-American and Hispanic males attending large inner-city schools that serve very poor neighborhoods faced – and still face – the greatest risk of becoming victims or perpetrators of a violent act at school.

(This is true despite the recent series of multiple shootings in suburban, middle-class white schools.)

# Common Misconceptions



- Most people with mental illness are violent.
- Depression is a normal part of the aging process
- I have a great family and supportive friends – I don't need to talk to a professional.
- If I seek mental health treatment, they're just going to give me some pills to take
- Psychiatrists are only in it for the money

Video



# Moving Beyond Survival Mode:

(Promoting Mental Wellness and Resiliency as a  
Way to Cope with Urban Trauma

Mee Productions

Stress & Trauma – Domestic Violence – Single  
Parenting

# Statistics



- The average annual violent crime rate in urban areas is 74% higher than the rural crime rate and 34% higher than suburban areas.
- African American males are the main perpetrators and victims of violence in urban areas and have the highest risk for being victims of homicide.

# Statistics



Misunderstanding and misinterpreting behaviors have led to tragic consequences, including inappropriately placing minorities in the criminal and juvenile justice systems.

# Statistics



- Forty-Seven percent of low-income African-American youth have witnessed a murder and 56% have witnessed a stabbing.
- In a survey of urban elementary and high school students and almost half reported being directly victimized; 75% reported witnessing a robbery, stabbing shooting or homicide.

# Statistics



- 1,035 African Americans ages 10-19 were surveyed; 75% witnessed a violent act and 46.5% had been a victim of violence.
- In a study of children in Head Start, 57% of the student's parents stated that their child witnessed mild levels of violence and 8% witnessed severe levels of violence. However, when the students were surveyed, 37% reported being a witness to severe violence.

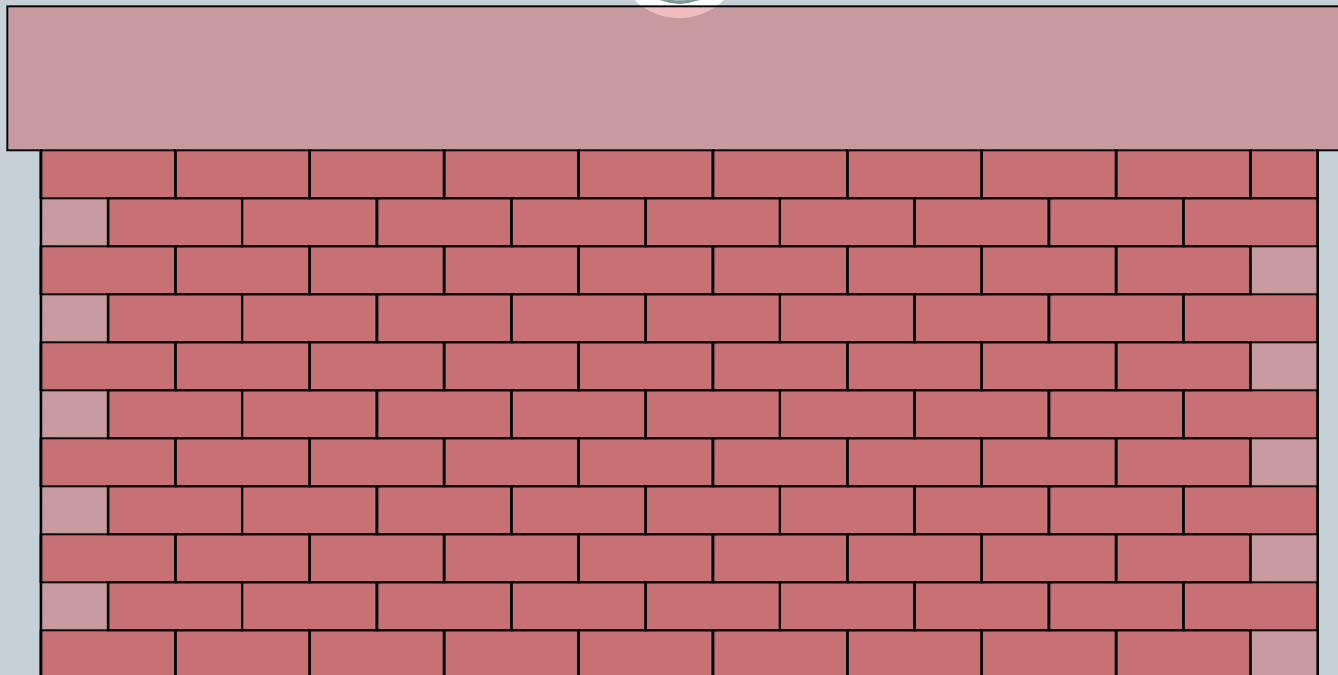
# Access To Care



According to the National Institute of Mental Health, these and other diverse communities are underserved by the nation's mental health system. One out of three African Americans who need mental health care receives it. Compared to the general population, African Americans are more likely to stop treatment early and are less likely to receive follow-up care.



# Barriers to Treatment



# Barriers to Seeking Treatment



- ✦ Denial
- ✦ Embarrassment/shame
- ✦ Don't want/refuse help
- ✦ Lack money/insurance
- ✦ Fear
- ✦ Lack Knowledge of treatment/problem
- ✦ Hopelessness

# Barriers to Seeking Treatment



- Provider may not understand the culture
- Don't know where to go
- Child care
- Location/hours of service
- Transportation

## Barriers to Seeking Treatment (continued)



- Symptoms are often masked with substance abuse or other medical conditions.
- Rely on our religious communities to deal with emotional problems.

## Barriers to Seeking Treatment (continued)



*Resistance to seeking mental health care sometimes comes from a sense of loyalty to family members who have gone on before us.*

## Barriers to Seeking Treatment (continued)



- Communities of color frequently seek help in primary care, as opposed to mental health specialty care and often receive mental health care in emergency rooms and in psychiatric hospitals.
- We are overrepresented in these settings partly because we delay seeking treatment until our symptoms are more severe.

Video Clip



# “Moving Beyond Survival Mode”

(Domestic Violence/Single Parenting)

# Using Oral Communications to Counter Arguments

## ORAL

- Important Info is passed down through stories
- Receiver can ask questions or challenge a message
- Sender gets immediate feedback (verbally or non-verbally)
- Let me know what you think

## Literate-Based

- Important Info is passed down through writing
- Receiver has no opportunity
- Sender could have no idea how message is being received
- “Take it or leave it”



# Oral Communications (cont'd)

## Argument

- I don't need help. I'm fine.
- I don't want somebody analyzing me/getting into my head
- I've got too much other stuff in my life that is more important

## Counter-Argument

- Even the strongest person needs to lean on somebody sometimes
- The answers are in you. A counselor can help you find them.
- Isn't your mental wellness (keeping your mind right) worth it?

# Oral Communications (cont'd)



If you really want a mental wellness message to resonate with your audience, it need to be both reflect and respect the culture, style and language of that audience.

The most effective way to reflect and respect an audience is to engage it in developing the message.

# Oral Communications (cont'd)

## Argument

- I don't want my business in the street
- I don't want to be labeled as "slow", "weak", "crazy" or having a problem
- I don't want to be considered weak. People take advantage of you.
- I can take a drink or smoke some weed and my problems won't bother me

## Counter-Argument

- All mental health services are confidential
- I'm not going to judge you. I'm here for you.
- You don't have to handle everything on your own
- Drop the weed and alcohol and talk to some instead

# Oral Communications (cont'd)

## Argument

- I don't trust White people
- Black people can take/deal with almost anything. Look at what we've survived.
- I'm on top of my game

## Counter-Argument

- Not all mental wellness professional are white. Overcoming trust issues is the first step to good therapy.
- It's time to break the cycle. We don't have to keep handling things the same (negative) way.
- Even the toughest soldier needs a shoulder to lean on.

# Psychological Challenges Facing Black Youths



- Identity
- Intimacy
- Coping with Racism
- Finding A Source of Strength

# Identity



In black communities, constant questions are:

- How can I be powerful
- Strong
- Respected

In the world of other adults?

Respect is hugely important to the black community and you should be aware of the seriousness of “dissing” someone.

# Identity



- Due to racism, many feel they do not get the respect they felt they deserved or are unable to let their guard down and “rest.”
- Harvard professor Henry Louis Gates Jr., one of the nation's pre-eminent African-American scholars, was arrested July 2009 at his home by Cambridge police investigating a possible break-in.

# Identity



All people have dreams. The problem in America where there is a history of racism the question, is can you find a pathway to that dream?

The black community is filled with broken dreams.  
Brothers on the corner had a dream

Brothers and sisters in jail had a dream once.

Somewhere those dreams got snuffed out.

We must empower communities of color to achieve those dreams.



# Intimacy



From the cradle to the grave is the human need to be connected and nurtured next to the mother's heart.

When life's end is near and the machine has flat lined, what do doctors tell you to do?

The human need for intimacy is satisfied in four relationships as persons of color moves through the life cycle.

# Intimacy



- Extended Family
- Male Peers
- Special Romantic Relations
- Mentors

# Intimacy



The high amount of single parent homes makes it difficult to nurture children into emotionally healthy adults.

In particular, male children need “HANDS ON” male mentors for guidance.

If male guidance is not provided, it will be found in gangs or other means.

# Effects of Racism



- Negative Coping Behaviors
- Self-medicating
- Acting Out
- Denial
- Internalization

# Finding Sources of Strength



There are seven African American psychological strengths that have carried us 400+ years in this foreign land:

# Sources of Strength



- Improvisation
- Resilience
- Connectedness to Others
- Spirituality
- Emotional Vitality
- Gallows Sense of Humor
- Healthy Suspicion of Persons Who Don't Look Like Us

Video



# Moving Beyond Survival Mode:

Promoting Psychological  
Strengths and Protective Factors

# Improvisation



When you live in a country which has a history of not giving you an equal range of choices, you have to improvise. You have to be imaginative, creative and innovative .

Gladys Knight said it best with "I've got to use my imagination to make the best of a bad situation and keep on keeping on!"

With 10 people to feed and a stay at home Mother, she know improvisation!



# Resilience



The ability to recover from a setback.

Most folks in the black community will not go from “0” – 70 without a setback. Failure and defeat is built in.

The question is can you get back up after a setback and keep on keeping on?

The goal is to heal and become stronger in the “broken places” (learning from the experience)

# Spirituality/Soul Power



Belief that there is a life affirming force which permeates the universe that gives meaning and inspiration to all things.

Since slavery we always believed we would be delivered. We'd walk around out churches with drums beating shouting and crying but soon those tears would turn to shouts of joy!

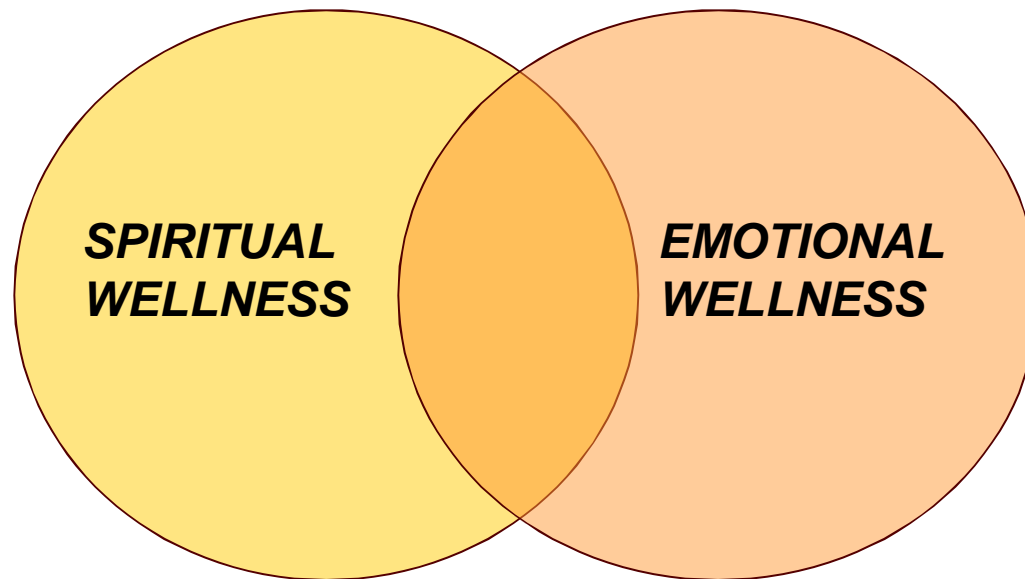
# Spiritual Wellness & Emotional Wellness



***SPIRITUAL  
WELLNESS***

***EMOTIONAL  
WELLNESS***

# A Greater Sense of Wellbeing



# Emotional Vitality



Check out a dance club!

No matter how many bills are due, significant other has left you, or unemployment exists, dance is therapy!

# Other Positive Outlets



Poetry

Rapping

Singing

Listening to Music

Journaling

Hair Dressing

Exercising

Sports

# Gallows Sense Of Humor



You have to learn how to laugh and cry as you go through this life.

When you have experienced the worst tragedy you could imagine and have cried your eyes out. When all the tears are gone, the only thing left to do is to laugh say the heck with it and go about your business!

Langston Hughes



Jesse B. Semple





# MHANJ Programs & Services

973-571-4100

## Community Education Department:

Aims to promote mental health, raise awareness and reduce the stigma of mental illness.

Promoting Emotional Wellness and Spirituality  
(PEWS) (Contact Laverne Williams @ ext. 130)

On-site presentations and workshops in the  
community (Contact Emma Shelby @ ext. 113)

Mental Health Players (Contact Sharon Curran @ ext.125)





# MHANJ Programs & Services

973-571-4100

## Workforce Development:



Provides training and assistance to consumers in the role of becoming social service providers. Also assists with job referrals and placements.

(Contact Ray Cortese @ ext. 316)



Provides training and technical assistance to mental health providers and agencies to expand employment opportunities for consumers.

(Contact Faith McCalla @ ext. 131)



# MHANJ Programs & Services

## Community Support Services:

- Community Advocates:

Employs POST workers(Peer Outreach Support Team) trained through Consumer Connections program to provide direct support to consumers in the community.

Ocean County-Lakewood, NJ

Contact Michelle Green@ 732-905-1132

Hudson County-Jersey City, NJ

Contact Steve Rosenel @ 201-653-4700

Union County-Kenilworth, NJ

Contact Steve Rosenel @ 908-272-5189

Atlantic County-Absecon, NJ

Contact Jamie Angelini @ 609-272-1700



# MHANJ Programs & Services

## Community Support Services:

### Intensive Family Support Services (IFSS):

Provides clinical support, education and advocacy services to families of consumers with mental illness both individually and through support groups.

Union County-Kenilworth, NJ

Contact Joyce Benz @ 308-272-5309

Atlantic County-Absecon, NJ

Contact Christine Gromadzyn @ 609-272-1700



# MHANJ Programs & Services

973-571-4100

## Community Support Services:

- Self Help Centers: Provides resources, socialization, and various support groups
  - “Journey to Wellness”
    - 575 North Main St., Barnegat, NJ, **1-888-698-8818**
    - Runs a peer to peer warm line and operates a “Wellness on Wheels” outreach vehicle
  - “Esperanza” (Hope)
    - 361-363 Monroe Ave, Kenilworth, NJ, **908-272-5296**
    - Self Help Center for Spanish speaking consumers
  - “ICE” (Individuals in Concerned Effort)
    - Moving to Pleasantville, NJ, **609-272-1700**



# MHANJ Programs & Services

## Training

(NJDRCC)



### NJ Disaster Response Crisis Counselor Certification Program

*Working with NJDMHS and the Certification Board provides training and certification to mental health professionals for disaster work.*

[www.culturallycompetentmentalhealthnj.org](http://www.culturallycompetentmentalhealthnj.org)

[www.njdrcc.org](http://www.njdrcc.org)



A collaboration between MHANJ and IINJ to provide training to mental health providers in northern NJ to assure access to culturally and linguistically appropriate services for our state's diverse communities.

# References



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- Buka, S. L., Stichick, T. L., Birdthistle, I., & Earls, F. J. (2001). Youth exposure to violence: Prevalence, risks, and consequences. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 71, 298-310.
- *National Urban League Policy Institute*
- *MEE's (Motivational Education Entertainment) Audience Research Promoting Black Mental Wellness*
- Ariana Shahinfar, Ph.D., Department of Psychology, University of North Carolina - Charlotte

# The Mental Health Association in NJ



88 Pompton Avenue  
Verona, New Jersey 07044

973-571-4100

Fax: 973-571-1777

Website: [www.mhanj.org](http://www.mhanj.org)

Email: [info@mhanj.org](mailto:info@mhanj.org)