

GRAND RAPIDS

African American
Health Institute

Research Brief on **Mental Health** in the Black Community

A Kent County, Michigan Focus Piece

The Grand Rapids African American Health Institute (GRAAHI) is a nonprofit health organization in Grand Rapids, Michigan that focuses on improving health equity for Blacks using a CARE approach (community service, advocacy, research and education).

GRAAHI developed this brief to inform policymakers, educators and community members on the increasing need to tackle mental health challenges in the Black community.

graahi.com



What is mental health?

- The World Health Organization (WHO) defines mental health as the **state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.**(1)
- A person's mental health affects their **psychological, emotional** and **social well-being**, influencing their thoughts, actions and feelings towards themselves, others and their environment.(2)
- Mental health is directly linked to **physical health, self-esteem, relationships, job function** and **overall life experiences.**(3)

Are mental illness and poor mental health the same?

- **Mental illness** and **poor mental health** are used **interchangeably**, but they represent different things. Mental illness is a condition that affects a person's thoughts and feelings, along with their moods and behaviors.(3)
- **Examples** of mental illnesses include **anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder**, and **schizophrenia**. A person can have or be diagnosed with a mental illness but not experience poor mental health. See the example to the right.(3)
- **Poor mental health is defined** (by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) as **someone who reports their mental health to not be good at least 14 of the past 30 days** (via stress, depression and emotional problems).(4)
- A person with mental illness, who is managing their condition, may report their mental health to be mostly good in the past 30 days, while someone with no mental illness may report their mental health to be mostly poor (or for 14 or more days) in the past 30 days.(3)



What's the impact of mental illness?

- **More than half of Americans** will be diagnosed with a mental illness or disorder during their lifetime.(3)
- **About 20% of Americans** (1 in 5) will experience a mental illness each year.(3)
- **One in 25 Americans** lives with a **serious mental illness** such as major depression or schizophrenia.(3)
- **About 20%** (1 in 5 children) will suffer a **debilitating mental illness** during their lifetime.(3)
- Depression afflicts nearly **16 million Americans** each year.(5)
- **Suicide** is the **10th leading cause of death** in the United States (US) and 2nd leading cause for people aged 15-34.(3)
- Having a mental illness increases a person's chances of experiencing **physical health problems** such as diabetes, heart disease and HIV.(3)
- Serious mental illnesses cost the US over **\$193 billion** each year in lost earnings.(3)



What causes mental illness?

- Experiences related to **chronic conditions** such as diabetes or cancer
- Early life experiences such as **abuse** or **trauma** (e.g., sexual assault, physical or emotional abuse, witnessing violence)
- **Genetic factors** or **chemical imbalances** in the brain
- Using **alcohol** or **recreational drugs**
- Feelings of **loneliness** or **isolation** (e.g., having few or no friends)(3)

What are different types of mental illness?

- Anxiety disorders
- Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder
- Disruptive behavioral disorders
- Depression and other mood disorders
- Eating disorders
- Personality disorders
- Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Schizophrenia spectrum and other psychotic disorders
- Substance use disorders

For more information on mental illness, visit this link:
www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/learn/index.htm



What are different types of mental health stigma?

- **Public stigma:** refers to negative or discriminatory beliefs and attitudes from others on mental illness
- **Self-stigma:** includes the internal attitudes and shame that one possesses for mental illness
- **Organizational stigma:** involves organizational or systemic policies or practices that limit opportunities for people with mental illnesses (6)

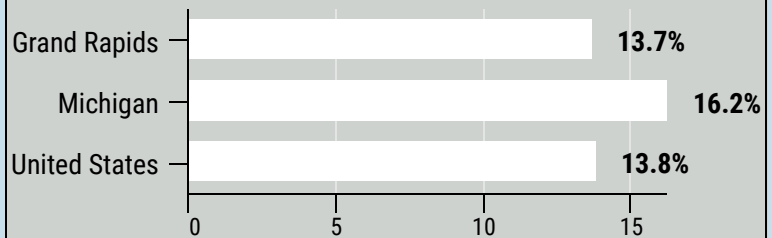


Mental health status in Kent County, MI



- In 2019, 13.7% of Kent County, MI adults reported poor mental health compared to 16.2% for Michigan residents and 13.8% for US residents.(CDC)
- Using data from 2017-2019, **13.9% of Blacks reported poor mental health** compared to 11.1% for Whites in Kent County.(MDHHS)

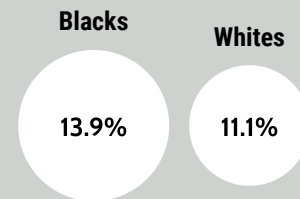
Poor Mental Health in Grand Rapids, MI and US, 2019



Adults reporting poor mental health 14+ days in past 30 days

Source: CDC

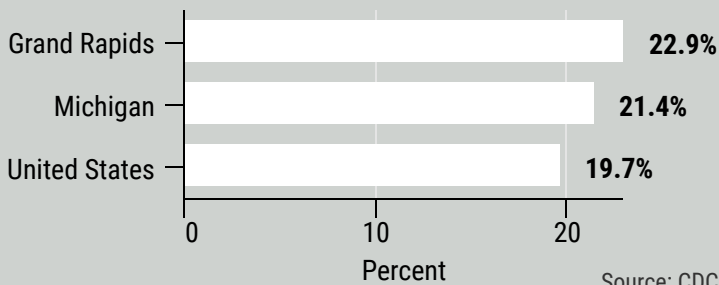
Poor Mental Health Rates By Race in Kent Co., 2017-19



Adults reporting poor mental health 14+ days in past 30 days

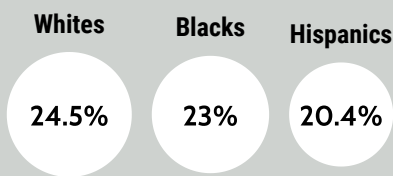
Source: MDHHS

Depression Rates in Grand Rapids, MI and US, 2019



Source: CDC

Depression Rates By Race/Ethnicity in Kent Co., 2017-19



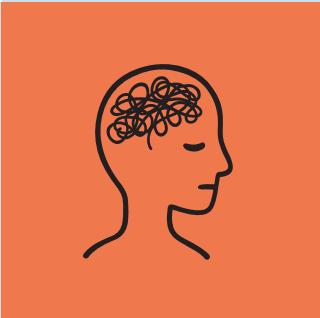
Source: MDHHS

- In 2019, 22.9% of Kent County, MI residents were ever told they had any form of depression compared to 21.4% for Michigan residents and 19.7% for US residents.(CDC)
- Using data from 2017-2019, 24.5% of Whites were ever told they had any form of **depression** compared to **23% for Blacks** and 20.4% for Hispanics.(MDHHS)

These data points and more reside in GRAAHI's Health Equity Index at hei.graahi.org.



Are Blacks more likely to experience mental illness or attempt suicide than other groups?



- Blacks do not typically experience mental illness or attempt suicide at higher rates than Whites.(7)
However, **suicide attempts among Black adolescents increased by 73%** from 1991-2017, while suicide attempts among White youth decreased during that time period.(8)
- A study found that **Black youth aged 5-12 were nearly two times more likely to commit suicide than White youth** in this age group using data from 2001-2015. Among the 1,661 suicides for Black children in this study, **73.8% of the cases involved Black boys** and 26.2% Blacks girls.(9)
- In 2018, **16% of Black Americans** (4.8 million) reported having a **mental illness**.(7)
- From 2008-2018, **serious mental illness increased** among all ages of Blacks in the US.(7)
- Roughly **25% of Blacks** seek mental health care compared to **40% for Whites**.(10)



What factors can degrade the mental health status of Blacks?

- High rates of **chronic conditions** such as heart disease, diabetes and cancer
- High rates of **poverty** and **unemployment**
- High rates of **incarceration** and the challenges of **assimilating** back into society
- Encounters with **racism, police brutality** and **racial discrimination**
- Exposure to **violence** and **trauma**, especially in low-income areas
- High rates of **hopelessness** and **isolation**



What factors may be preventing Blacks from seeking mental health therapy?

- **Distrust** of the health care system from historical maltreatment
- **Stigma** or **shame** associated with mental illness such as others seeing them as “**crazy**” or “**weak**”
- **Poor access to mental health services** that are culturally tailored and available for Blacks
- **Lack of income** or resources to pay for services



How could the COVID-19 pandemic affect the mental health status of Blacks?

COVID-19 compounded existing issues in the Black community including:

- **Unemployment** and **salary reductions**
- **Income challenges**
- **Stress** and **anxiety**
- **Poor access** to quality health care
- **Distrust** and concerns of the health care system
- **Isolation** and **loneliness**



Take Off The Mask – Facing The Mental Health Stigma In The Black Community



The Black Men's Health Project | Click to take survey.

Take Off the Mask: Facing the Mental Health Stigma in the Black Community

Dr. Harold Neighbors of Michigan State University

<http://blackmenshealthproject.org/>



What are solutions for addressing mental health issues in the Black community?



- Blacks represent less than 2% of all psychologists in the US (7), so it is imperative to **increase support and funding to this small class of Black psychologists.**
- Provide programs and funding to **train more Black psychologists and mental health specialists,** as potential patients are more likely to seek mental health care from people who look like them.
- Implement **educational efforts to reduce the stigma and shame** associated with mental illness and poor mental health in the Black community.
- Support and/or create efforts to **reduce stress and trauma upon the Black community,** especially in the form of racism, discrimination and prejudice.
- Develop innovative strategies, via social media and culturally tailored campaigns, to **encourage Black youth and adults to seek mental health care.** This campaign should **focus on the epidemic of Black boys committing suicide** and the need to encourage their thoughts and feelings on this matter.
- Blacks experience high rates of unemployment and poverty, so **creating employment opportunities and educational programs would be ideal** to reduce this mental health burden on the Black community.



If you want to learn more about mental illness or potential solutions, view the resources on the next page. In the meantime, please know you are not alone. Below are famous Black people who battled or still battle with a mental illness or disorder.

- Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (depression)
- Nina Simone (bipolar disorder/depression)
- Don Cornelius (depression)
- Jennifer Lewis (bipolar disorder)
- Chance the Rapper (anxiety)
- Serena Williams (depression)
- Lionel Aldridge (schizophrenia)
- Janet Jackson (depression)
- Kanye West (bipolar disorder)
- Macy Gray (bipolar disorder)

Resources for Mental Health Care

(located mostly in West Michigan)

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-8255)

<https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>

Black Men's Health Project

<http://blackmenshealthproject.org/>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): mental health tools

www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/tools-resources/index.htm

Black and African American therapists in Kent County, MI

www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapists/african-american/mi/kent-county

Kent County Health Department: suicide prevention

www.accesskent.com/Health/HealthPromo/suicide_prevention.htm

MDHHS: free or low cost mental health care

www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/0,5885,7-339-71547_2943_52115-203750--,00.html

MDHHS: mental health resources for COVID-19 relief

www.michigan.gov/coronavirus/0,9753,7-406-98178_99557---,00.html

Kent County Prevention Coalition

<https://kcpreventioncoalition.org/>

Network 180

www.network180.org/

Hope Network

<https://hopenetwork.org/>

Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services

www.pinerest.org/

Michigan 2-1-1

www.mi211.org/

Black Mental Health Alliance

<https://blackmentalhealth.com/>

Safe Black Space

www.safeblackspace.org/

The Boris Lawrence Henson Foundation

<https://borislhensonfoundation.org/>

Safe Project

www.safeproject.us/resource/black-community/

Works Cited

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www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response
2. CDC | Mental health
www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/index.htm
3. CDC | Learn about mental health
www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/learn/index.htm
4. CDC | Health-related quality of Life (HRQOL): methods and measures
www.cdc.gov/hrqol/methods.htm
5. CDC | Mental health conditions: depression and anxiety
www.cdc.gov/tobacco/campaign/tips/diseases/depression-anxiety.html
6. American Psychiatric Association | Stigma, prejudice and discrimination against people with mental illness
www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/stigma-and-discrimination
7. Mental Health America | Black and African American communities and mental health
www.mhanational.org/issues/black-and-african-american-communities-and-mental-health
8. American Psychological Association | Sounding the alarm on black youth suicide
www.apa.org/news/apa/2020/black-youth-suicide
9. Bridge JA, Horowitz LM, Fontanella CA, et al. Age-Related Racial Disparity in Suicide Rates Among US Youths From 2001 Through 2015. *JAMA Pediatr.* 2018;172(7):697–699. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2018.0399
10. McLean Hospital (Harvard Medical School Affiliate) | How can we break mental health barriers in communities of color?
www.mcleanhospital.org/essential/how-can-we-break-mental-health-barriers-communities-color

Contact Information

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