

Family support helps African-American boys with depression

February 3 2010

(PhysOrg.com) -- Teen African-American boys cope with their depression by getting support from relatives, but feel apprehensive about seeking professional help, a new study says.

The study by researchers at the University of Michigan, University of Maryland and Howard University examines the influence of mental health stigma and social support on depressive symptoms among African-American adolescent boys.

"African-American adolescent boys underutilize mental health service due to stigma associated with depression," said Sean Joe, associate professor of social work and assistant professor of psychiatry at the University of Michigan. His research examines the epidemiology of suicide among African-Americans and father-focused family-based interventions to prevent urban African-American adolescent males from engaging in self-destructive behaviors.

The study's participants came from mental health treatment and community-based settings, such as outpatient mental health centers. They were asked about the possible stigma if they visited a [mental health](#) professional, what social support was available to them, and their depressive symptoms.

The main finding asserts that social support among African-American boys may play an important role in lowering depressive symptoms, particularly when these youth face stigma regarding [mental illness](#) and

service use.

Participants with higher depressive-symptom levels indicated they spent time alone, the research shows. They engaged in reading, listening to music, playing video games or [watching television](#) to help ease the pain.

Most participants reported it was a family member, usually a mother, who helped them initially identify their [depressive symptoms](#). Then, they often confided in the relative before going to an "outsider," or professional.

Still, participants were likely to get family support, but not trust professional providers. This lack of trust was often transmitted to them by their family members, the researchers said.

Friends weren't supportive because participants expressing an emotion, such as crying, were seen as weak or vulnerable. If this personal information was shared with the participants' peers, they might be teased.

Joe collaborated on the study with lead author Michael Lindsey, assistant professor at the University of Maryland, and Von Nebbitt, assistant professor at the Howard University.

The findings appear in the *Journal of Black Psychology*.

More information: [jbp.sagepub.com/cgi/content/ab ...
t/0095798409355796v1](http://jbp.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/0095798409355796v1)

Provided by University of Michigan

Citation: Family support helps African-American boys with depression (2010, February 3)
retrieved 5 May 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2010-02-family-african-american-boys-depression.html>

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