

# MENTAL HEALTH

## IN HOUSEHOLDS OF COLOR

*\*This blog was reviewed by the student's parent prior to publication.*

Suicide is the third-leading cause of death in young people ages 15-24 (SAVE, p. 1). Despite the detrimental effects of mental illnesses, such as depression and anxiety, I feel that households of color do not acknowledge how prominent these illnesses are.

As a teenager who suffers from depression and anxiety, I see firsthand how my family not only misunderstands my mental illnesses but can not fully comprehend them due to a lack of awareness of how mental health can be detrimental to one's outlook on not only life but themselves.

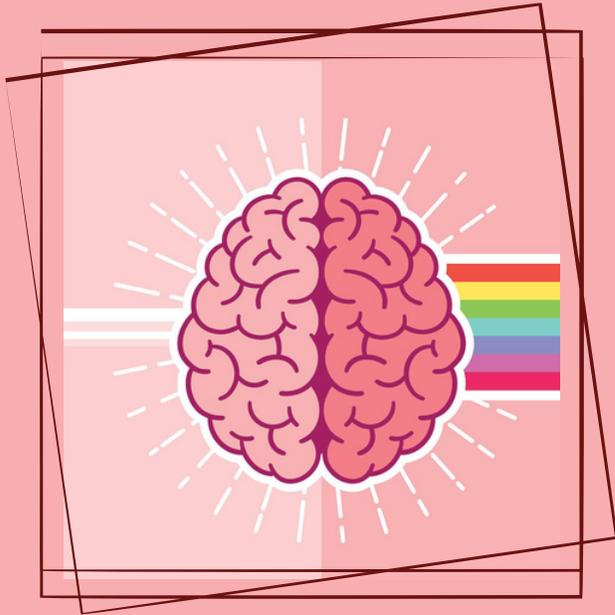
Having regular conversations about this topic is the first step in getting rid of the negative depictions of mental health: that it doesn't exist, that it is not a trying issue, and that it does not have awful effects. I hope to use my own personal experiences, alongside statistics, to start this conversation.

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### My Personal Experience:

My mom does not mean it. I know that she cares. Words like, "emotional," and "dramatic," just tend to trigger me because I cannot control how my brain functions. Words like these make me feel uncommon- separated from the rest of the world who are "normal."

Being in a household of color where there is this stigma that mental illnesses are bad made me not want to talk to anyone about how I felt. This inevitably led to a wedge between me and my mom, but it ended up being repaired when she finally just listened instead of judging me. So, what changed?



## Communication:

Communication. I was so used to shutting her out, treating her as if she'd never understand, until I realized that my mother's upbringing played a part in how she acted toward me. Growing up, my mom had to be strong. She never was able to talk about her issues without having to hold the title "sensitive." Now, that unresolved trauma has trickled down to her children; whether she'd like to admit it or not.



When we sat down and cried together, something changed. When we realized we were both just attempting to do what we could with the hand we were dealt our perspectives on our individual problems shifted.

While yes, my mom may not have comforted me through hard times at first, but where did she learn that from? Her mother. And who taught my grandmother to remain silent but resilient through her traumas? Her mother.

Generational trauma, alongside systemic oppression, makes it hard for minorities to express emotions healthily because we- as a whole - aren't used to it. Because of adversity African Americans often face on a daily basis, we are taught to simply "tough it out." The problem is: what are we supposed to do when we can't?

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## Mental Health Treatment:

My mother doesn't believe that treatment, such as therapy, will help her through her trauma and I never understood why. Then, I realized that people of color oftentimes don't seek out help because of not only systemic oppression but believing society will label them "crazy" if they do. Considering that the majority of psychologists— and other health providers —are typically white, it is understandable as to why the majority of people seeking mental health treatment are not minorities. "Roughly, about 25% of Black Americans seek mental health treatment, compared to 40% of White Americans. Roughly, 65% of African American youth report traumatic experiences, compared to 30% of their peers from other ethnic groups" (McLean Hospital, 2023, p.2).



**IT'S OKAY  
TO ASK FOR  
HELP.**

These numbers are telling. These numbers maintain that White Americans are more likely to utilize the resources provided while more than half of Black Americans, with extensive trauma that need it, do not aim to seek it.

Historically speaking, it is noted that "African Americans have been misdiagnosed at higher rates than white patients. " (Dworak, para. 4). It is also noted that black communities have been exploited by the medical community for the sake of advancement.

This explains why my mother, and other African Americans, have a hard time trusting in healthcare in general. Breaking down this barrier between healthcare professionals and African Americans will inevitably increase the amount of people of color seeking mental health assistance, but that is an entire discussion for another day. The question is, what can we do as a society?

### **So, What Can Society Do?**

Education. It's apparent that people of color have been given the short end of the stick. Because of factors such as generational and systemic oppression, there's a lack of understanding of what mental health truly is and the effects alongside how to deal with it.. To start, there is a need for more awareness in households of color, and even society, in order to change this common stigma and alter the approach of the subject—mental health.

If we break down this mindset of mental health being bad, or non-existent, we can finally give not only African Americans the assistance, and knowledge they so desperately need and maybe even other minorities. As a society, we must do better. We need to live in an environment where we can have these needed conversations about our emotions which will undoubtedly strengthen the relationships around us. We need to live in an environment that will help us flourish amid traumatic experiences. An environment like this is beneficial and necessary.