

David Johnson

From: David Johnson
Sent: Tuesday, April 27, 2004 7:46 AM
To: David Johnson

Racial Role in Suicide Studied
The Atlanta Journal-Constitution - April 21, 2004

Suicide intervention programs aimed at African-Americans should focus on reducing the cultural stigma of admitting to depression and seeking mental health help, a new state study suggests.

Upon reviewing 1,300 suicide cases in Fulton County from 1988 through 2002, health researchers discovered that black people were less likely than white people to report being depressed or having a family history of suicide.

They also found blacks who killed themselves had been more reluctant than whites to tell friends or family about relationship and financial troubles.

Blacks also were less likely to leave a suicide note than whites but more likely to hurt others while committing suicide, the analysis found.

During the 15-year period, blacks composed about 30 percent of the suicides and whites about 70 percent; less than 1 percent were attributed to other ethnic or racial groups.

Of suicides among African-Americans, only 10 percent were women, as compared with 23 percent among whites. One common link between black males and females: The preference of firearms to kill themselves.

But formulating clear-cut conclusions about the differences between blacks and whites when it comes to suicide is challenging, researchers admitted.

"One limitation could be a cultural bias," said Karon Abe, a Georgia Division of Public Health epidemiologist who presented the data Monday. "Is depression really less in the black community or is it just not being reported because of increased stigma?"

Limitations on health care access and unwillingness to seek mental health help also must be taken into account, she noted.

Nationwide, about 30,000 suicides are reported every year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, host of the annual Epidemic Intelligence Service conference in downtown Atlanta, where the study was released.

Suicide statistics and information surrounding the deaths were taken from the Fulton County medical examiner's records. Because similar numbers of blacks and whites reside in Fulton County, state health officials are starting to analyze its death data for similarities and differences.

Nationally, whites historically have had higher rates of suicide than African-Americans. However, suicide among young blacks aged 15 to 24 has risen dramatically in the past decade.

Copyright 2004 The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

This news story is not produced by the American Psychological Association and does not necessarily represent the opinions of the association.

PsycPORT® is a product of the American Psychological Association created to provide quick access to mass-media information related to psychology.

©2001 American Psychological Association

Last updated: 04/25/2004 - 06:16 AM