Reflections on the Mental Health of Black Americans: From NSBA to NSAL and Beyond

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Program for Research on Black Americans

THE DISTINGUISHED DIVERSITY SCHOLAR CAREER SYMPOSIUM

October 30, 2017
The year was 1976!

- The phone rang…
- Belinda Tucker (“BT Express”)
- The conversation…
- The only problem…
- I had to get to work…
“James and Jerry are doing a proposal on mental health”

- On my shelf, there were two books:
- DSM 2nd Edition
Monograph Series / No. 4

Americans View
Their Mental Health
A Nationwide Interview Survey

Gerald Gurin
Joseph Veroff
Sheila Feld

A Report to the Staff Director, Jack M. Swalt
1960


Indianapolis Public Library
Indiana University
University Blvd.
Indianapolis, Indiana
The National Survey of Black Americans

- NSBA came out of the “AVTMH” Tradition.
- The effect of distress on help-seeking.
- Skeptical about diagnosis for Black Americans.
National Survey of Black Americans

- National “Need Assessment.”
- Unmet need for mental health services.
- But what constitutes “need?”
  - Symptom checklist?
  - Clinical Diagnosis?
  - Self-reported personal problems?
National Survey of Black Americans

- NSBA relied on indigenous terminology.
  - Mixed Methods – Focus Group
  - “Nervous Breakdown”
  - 50% sought professional help.
  - 87% if we include informal support.
Take Home Points

- Reluctant to seek professional help.
- Personal and System Barriers.
- When we do seek professional help...
  - Doctors/Emergency Rooms
  - Ministers/Pastor
  - Friends and Family
- Who often miss the signs of mental disorder.
- When we see a mental health specialist.
  - Risk of Misdiagnosis
Three Questions

- Are we meeting the needs of Black citizens?
- What factors drive symptoms of distress?
- What social and political processes motivated such a radical idea?

- An all Black national sample?!
Three Speakers

- **Carl Bell, MD**
  Patient care and the impact of racial differences on the psychiatric diagnosis of Black Americans.

- **Darrell Hudson, PhD, MPH**
  The paradox of Black-White differences in the social determinants of depression.

- **Belinda Tucker, PhD**
  Hopes and fears coming out of 60s: The revolutionary foundations of the National Survey of Black Americans.
Thank You!

Interviewer Training for the National Survey of American Life
May 15, 1999