

Celebrating our Cultures: Mental Health Promotion with the African Caribbean Community

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Description	This resource makes the case for mental promotion with black and minority ethnic communities in England. It sets out a framework for delivering local interventions and addressing the needs of black and minority ethnic communities within mental health promotion strategies being implemented in response to Standard 1 of the National Service Framework for Mental Health
Cross Ref	Making It Happen: A guide to delivering mental health promotion. Inside Outside: Improving Mental Health Services for Black and Minority Ethnic Communities in England
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Mental health promotion with the African Caribbean community

Nearly 6.4 million people make up the black and minority ethnic population in England (that is 1 in 8 of the whole population). According to the 2001 Census, the number of people of Black Caribbean descent living in the UK is around 1.0% and people of Black African descent is 0.8%. Those defining themselves as Black Other make up 0.2% of the population. In the main, the community lives within the inner cities, and over half are British born.

Disadvantage and discrimination characterise the experiences of many people from black and minority ethnic communities, especially in the area of health and health care. They experience poorer health, have reduced life expectancy and have greater problems accessing health services than the majority white population. For mental health, major concerns include disparities and inequalities in terms of rates of mental ill health, service experience and service outcome.

Standard One of the National Service Framework for Mental Health (Department of Health 1999) requires health and social services to:

- Promote mental health for all, working with individuals and communities
- Combat discrimination against individuals and groups with mental health problems, and promote their social inclusion.

There is a need for both universal mental health promotion programmes that are sensitive to the needs of the whole population, as well as specific mental health promotion interventions that work with and target particular black and minority ethnic groups.

What is mental health?

Mental health means different things to different people. How we define mental health and mental illness is influenced by factors such as culture, background, values and belief systems and spirituality.

The following is one way of looking at mental health:

Mental health is about how we think and feel about ourselves and others and how we interpret the world around us. It affects our capacity to cope with change and major life events such as having a baby or experiencing bereavement; it affects our ability to communicate and to form and sustain relationships. Mental health is central to our overall health and well being.

What is mental health promotion?

Mental health promotion involves any action to enhance the mental well being of individuals, families, organisations or communities. It is about strengthening protective factors and reducing risk factors for mental health. It is the responsibility of a wide range of people working in health and social care, schools, faith communities, voluntary and community groups, and those involved in initiatives such as social inclusion, neighbourhood renewal and community strategies. It recognises that how people feel is a significant influence on health and is therefore essentially concerned with:

How individuals, families, organisations and communities think and feel

The factors which influence how we think and feel, individually and collectively

The impact that this has on overall health and well being

(Department of Health 2001)

Mental health promotion can increase the 'mental health literacy' and mental health awareness of individuals, organisations and communities, facilitating prevention and early detection and reducing fear and stigma associated with mental illness. It can help promote social inclusion, facilitate tolerance and participation, reduce anxiety and enable people to have more control within their lives; and can contribute to improved physical and mental well being and reduce the risk of some mental health problems. For people experiencing mental health problems, mental health promotion can help improve services and people's quality of life, and can assist in recovery.

People from different black and minority ethnic groups will benefit from living in a community that understands them, values, supports and empowers them.

Mental health promotion operates at three interconnected levels:

- **Strengthening individuals**

Increasing emotional resilience by promoting self-esteem, life and coping skills (for example, communicating, negotiating, relationship and parenting skills) and enabling people from different black and minority ethnic populations to develop a positive cultural identity and thereby build their confidence and sense of worth.

- **Strengthening communities**

Increasing social support, social inclusion and participation, improving community safety, neighbourhood environments, promoting childcare and self-help networks, promoting mental health within schools and workplaces e.g. through anti-bullying strategies and race equality schemes, programmes to tackle racism within schools, workplaces and the wider community.

- **Reducing structural barriers to mental health**

Challenging stereotypes, discrimination and inequalities and reducing the political, social and economic barriers influencing the capacity of different black and minority ethnic groups to participate. Work to develop health and social services that support and promote mental health; ensure people have access to good quality health care; increase access to education, meaningful employment, training opportunities, housing, benefit entitlements and support for vulnerable people.

Key mental health issues for the African Caribbean population

There is a great deal of diversity within any ethnic minority community, and each individual within an ethnic group is unique and different. Assumptions may be made that people have similar views, experiences or needs because they belong to a particular black or minority ethnic group. When planning mental health promotion, it is important to take account of other relevant issues for an individual such as gender, age, employment status, place of birth, experience of migration, family environment, and to recognise the complexity of people's lives. However, there are some common issues affecting all black and minority ethnic groups and also some issues that affect some groups disproportionately.

Key mental health issues for the African Caribbean community

General:

Racism
Stigma
Language barriers

Social risk factors:

Poverty
Unemployment (men)
Exclusion from school
Loneliness and isolation
Homelessness
Contact with the criminal justice system

Health:

High reported rates of schizophrenia
Low reported rates of depression /affective disorders

Service issues:

Delay seeking help
High use of physical/drug treatments
Low use of psychological/talking treatments
Compulsory admission under Mental Health Act
High rates of admission/readmission
Families/Carers have difficulties accessing help

Suggested action points to help you develop a model for engaging with African Caribbean communities on mental health promotion

Consult and work in partnership

- Design and deliver mental health promotion programmes in partnership with African Caribbean people and community organisations that work with them
- Consult effectively and ensure community involvement and ownership in planning, implementing and evaluating mental health promotion interventions
- Build partnerships between the black and minority ethnic voluntary sector and the statutory sector, and identify adequate and sustained funding for local groups so they can be partners in developing and delivering mental health promotion

Raise awareness

- Raise awareness about mental health issues, mental health services and how to access them, and build the mental health literacy of the African Caribbean population
- Develop mental health promotion materials specifically designed for African Caribbean people
- Work with opinion formers and African Caribbean community organisations, and provide mental health promotion interventions within accessible community venues including youth centres, schools, leisure facilities, faith organisations and local businesses
- Enable African Caribbean people to develop a positive cultural identity and build their confidence and sense of worth

Challenge discrimination

- Challenge racism, health inequalities, discrimination and stereotypes both within services and the wider community
- Promote employment opportunities for both those who do and do not currently use mental health services

Train

- Provide training for a wide range of workers, including anti-discrimination and cultural awareness to improve the way people experience services
- Provide support, training and information for carers and families to increase their knowledge and understanding about positive mental health, mental illness, symptoms, mental health services, and empower them to promote their own mental health and well being and that of the person they care for

Promote mental health within services

- Work towards developing culturally sensitive services that, for example, provide a room designated for prayer and other religious activity, female-only wards, culturally acceptable food
- Provide information within primary care about effective and accessible sources of support within the voluntary and community sector such as self help groups
- Raise awareness about the important role of spiritual and religious beliefs for some mental health service users
- Consult with African Caribbean service users to ensure that services are meeting their needs
- Involve African Caribbean voluntary and community groups in helping plan and provide support following discharge
- Provide accessible information about the services and treatment on offer, including side effects of medication and the availability of complimentary therapies and integrate non-medical and social models of care
- Ensure physical health needs are met and provide regular health checks and promotion information.

Examples of mental health promotion initiatives with the African Caribbean community

- **Antenna**

Antenna provides a culturally sensitive outreach service to people of African and Caribbean origin who are 16-25 years, support to families and carers, and awareness raising within Tottenham and Edmonton and to a range of service providers. The project visits schools, churches and mosques, youth services and educational centres in the borough to raise awareness about mental health issues with people from ethnic minorities, to tackle stigma and to cultivate a more accessible, sensitive approach to mental health issues. It contributes to a school health-mentoring programme. A community event attracting up to 500 people is held annually to raise awareness about mental health issues within the local community. The youth group also works in youth clubs, sixth form colleges and community centres to promote the work of Antenna.

For further information: antenna@outreachservice.fsnet.co.uk

- **African Caribbean Community Initiative**

ACCI aims to provide a holistic and culturally sensitive resource centre looking at the needs of the whole person and providing day care, outreach and supported housing and a wide range of activities to improve the quality of life and empower and enable individuals to interact socially. Volunteers are trained and supported to befriend members, visiting them at home and working with them at the day centre and joining in social events. The health advisory clinic offers regular health checks and a quit smoking service for both staff and members. The outreach team supports people suffering or recovering from mental illness and helps them obtain appropriate housing.

For further information: support@acci.fsnet.co.uk

Finding out more

NIMHE have published a resource 'Celebrating our Cultures – mental health promotion with black and minority ethnic communities' which provides more information and highlights 30 initiatives that are taking place across England working with different communities and in different settings (see www.nimhe.org.uk).



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