

The Emotional Stress in the African America Community from the COVID-19 Pandemic

The National Black Church Initiative (NBCI) is working with members of the Association of Black Psychologists plus city, county, state, and federal mental health professionals to tackle the complex issues that surround stress management in the African American and Latino communities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We have two goals. The first is to create pop-up clinics that provide free mental health services in poor African American and Latino neighborhoods and areas where the vaccine resistance rate is 80%. The second is to ease anxieties in these communities about the COVID-19 vaccines and encourage members of the community to get vaccinated when the time comes.

The pop-up clinics will be staffed by Black and Latino ministers and mental health professionals who will offer their services for free to help people cope with the economic, emotional, and physical stresses of the pandemic. We want the staff members to be Black and Latino to ensure that the help we provide is culturally competent and sensitive to the concerns of the African American and Latino communities during this very tough time. The NBCI will also develop literature on mental health and how to deal with fears about the COVID-19 vaccines. This literature will feature links for local psychologists and other mental health resources in the communities we visit.

The African American population is not only dealing with health-related stressors caused by the pandemic, but societal stressors brought on by the past two years of Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests against the Trump administration and riots against murderous cops shooting down innocent Black citizens. These multiple traumatic events have created overwhelming anxiety, PTSD, and a deep need for mental health services in the African American and Latino communities.

Many individuals in these communities' report experiencing race-related stress on a weekly basis, including workplace discrimination, microaggression, hate crimes, and the institutional racism that exists in today's society and which was amplified and encouraged by the Trump administration. Racial hatred is the background against which many members of the African American and Latino communities live their lives. When you add the stress of watching loved ones die in disproportionate numbers from COVID-19, the loss of jobs and the economic hardship that results, and the social isolation necessary to stop the spread of a virus during a pandemic, you see people facing a menacing world that has finally gone completely out of control.

Comfort and help are in short supply for people confined to their homes without financial resources. We hope to supply some of that comfort with our pop-up clinics and literature, and help people overcome their fears of being vaccinated, which is the only thing that will bring this pandemic to an end.