Noted Mental Health Scholar: “We Need a National Taskforce on Black Boys and Suicide”

NYU McSilver Institute's executive director Michael A. Lindsey spoke during a congressional briefing hosted by Rep. Bonnie Watson Coleman (D, N.J.)

(December 7, 2018) A troubling trend among American children ages 5-11 a leading scholar in child and adolescent health calling for a national task force to address it. The suicide rate of Black children ages 5-11 has doubled over the past generation, with boys accounting for most of the deaths. The rate of suicide is roughly twice as high as for Black children in that age group than it is for White children.

“What we need is to create a national taskforce to really look at this issue for that particular demographic and really try to understand the reasons why black boys are committing suicide at higher rates than any other group in that age category,” said Dr. Michael A. Lindsey PhD, MSW, MPH, a child and adolescent mental health services researcher who is executive director of the McSilver Institute for Poverty Policy and Research at New York University. His remarks were made on December 6 during a congressional staff briefing at the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C., that was hosted by Rep. Bonnie Watson Coleman (D, N.J.).

Dr. Lindsey called for the taskforce during a discussion titled, “Racial Disparity in Mental Health – the Need for Inclusion in Research and Resources,” that was moderated by Dr. Alfiee Breland-Noble, PhD, MHSc, Project Director of AAKOMA; and also joined by Denise Juliano-Bult, MSW, Chief, Systems Research and Disparities in Mental Health Services Research Programs, NIMH; and Dr. William B. Lawson, MD, PhD, editor-in-chief of the Journal of the National Medical Association. Rep. Watson Coleman’s chief of staff, James Gee, gave opening remarks.

There is a dearth of information about this alarming trend affecting the black community. A national taskforce would help to raise awareness and direct resources toward research and solutions, Lindsey contends. Suicide is still relatively rare among children, and lower among Black people in general than it is for Whites in the U.S.—all the more reason to get to the bottom of the increase among black boys. Meanwhile, one child under the age of 13 dies of suicide nearly every 5 days.

Dr. Lindsey also called for having more mental health professionals in every school, proportional to the number of children. “Oftentimes instead, we see that two or three schools are sharing one provider. That’s nonsensical to me,” he said.

Read more about suicide and mental health in black youth, and the solutions that the McSilver Institute proposes, in this fact sheet, as well as in Dr. Lindsey’s 2017 article in the American Journal of Orthopsychiatry with Danica R. Brown, MNS and Dr. Michael Cunningham, PhD, “Boys Do(n’t) Cry: Addressing the Unmet Mental Health Needs of African American Boys.”

See the full video of “Racial Disparity in Mental Health – the Need for Inclusion in Research and Resources,” on Rep. Watson Coleman’s Facebook page.

In addition to being the executive director of the McSilver Institute, Dr. Lindsey is the Martin Silver Professor of Poverty Studies at NYU Silver School of Social Work, and an Aspen Health Innovators Fellow. He also leads NYU’s university-wide Strategies to Reduce Inequality initiative from the McSilver Institute.
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