Boys Do(n’t) Cry: Suicide Among Black Boys

Michael A. Lindsey, PhD, MSW, MPH
Executive Director, NYU McSilver Institute

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CONGRESSIONAL BRIEFING

Racial Disparity In Mental Health
The Need for Inclusion in Research and Resources
Hosted by the Office of Representative Bonnie Watson Coleman
On April 6, 2009, 11-year-old Carl Joseph Walker-Hoover of Springfield, Mass. hanged himself after bullies at school repeatedly called him “gay.” The sixth-grader was a Boy Scout and loved to play sports.
Suicide & Youth

- From 1999 through 2015, 1,309 children ages 5 to 12 died of suicide in the U.S. (CDC, 2015)
- In the U.S., 1 child under the age of 13 dies of suicide almost every 5 days
- 76% of those who died in 1999-2015 were male

Prevalence in Black Youth

- Suicide: 3rd leading cause of death among all Black American youth, ages 10-19 (CDC, 2014).
- From 1993-2012, suicide rates have doubled among Black children, principally males (Bridge et al., 2015).
- Black boys ages 5-11: Only age group where rates are higher than any other age group (Bridge et al., 2015).
Suicide rate, per 1 million, for children aged 5-11 years in the U.S.

Suicide & Poverty

- Suicide rates in the U.S. are closely correlated to poverty rates (Kubrin et al., 2006; Kerr et al., 2017)
- Trauma and Suicide: Among urban males, PTSD is associated with increased suicide attempts (Wilcox et al., 2009)
- Incarcerated youth die by suicide at a rate 2-3 times higher than that of youth in the general population (Abram et al., 2008)

Other Contributing Factors

- Depression/Anxiety
- Lack of access to mental health treatment
- Bullying or Teasing
- Substance abuse
- Racial discrimination and other psychosocial stressors (e.g., police harassment, violence)
- Puberty
Solutions

Create a national task force on youth suicide and suicidality to examine the following:

- A public education campaign on the signs and symptoms of depression, trauma, and anxiety at school and at home.

- Prioritizing the nationwide funding and development of school-wide mental health prevention programs.

- A public awareness campaign on the need for more support for black boys by caring adults, family members, and friends.

- Prioritizing the funding and development of positive involvement by black boys in after-school and mentoring programs.
In Memoriam

Today we reflect on the tragic loss of lives including those of Gabriel Taye, Carl Joseph Walker-Hoover, and the many other Black boys ages 5-11 we have lost and are still losing to suicide.

About the NYU McSilver Institute

The McSilver Institute for Poverty Policy and Research at New York University is committed to creating new knowledge about the root causes of poverty, developing evidence-based interventions to address its consequences, and rapidly translating research findings into action through policy and best practices.

Our work includes co-directing New York State’s Community Technical Assistance Center of New York (CTAC) and the Managed Care Technical Assistance Center of New York (MCTAC), which are training, consultation, and educational resource centers serving all behavioral health agencies in New York State.

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