

# Promoting Mental Health in African American Adolescents and Young Adults

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# Why Focus on Adolescent/Young Adult Mental Health?

- Adolescent depression associated with many negative outcomes, including: substance abuse, academic problems, cigarette smoking, high-risk sexual behavior, 30-fold increased risk of completed suicide (Birmaher et al, 1996; Brent et al., 1998; Le, Munoz, Ippen, & Stoddard, 2003)
- Roughly one-half to three-quarters of adolescents experiencing depression will have subsequent depressive episodes during later adolescence and young adulthood (Emslie et al., 1997; Lewinsohn, Rohde, Klein, & Seeley, 1999; Weissman et al., 1999)

# Why Focus on “Disconnected” Adolescents/Young Adults?

- Public schools graduate only about 70% of their students, with this figure dropping to below 60% in many urban areas
- Rapid proliferation of youth employment and training programs
- Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) survey of 145 such programs highlighted health and mental health risks as barriers to program completion

# Why Conduct Work in a Participatory Fashion?

- Co-learning process
- Allows community to prioritize direction for work conducted, which enhances community buy-in
- Enhances cultural appropriateness of work conducted, which enhances research quality and potential usefulness to community

# Johns Hopkins University Center for Adolescent Health (CAH)

- Mission: To work in partnership with youth, people who work with youth, community residents, public policymakers and program administrators to help urban adolescents develop healthy adult lifestyles
- Founded 1994 as a CDC Prevention Research Center (PRC)

# Who are the Community Partners?

- Baltimore Youth Opportunity (YO!) Program
- Baltimore City Health Department
- Mayor's Office of Employment Development
- Youth-serving Agencies
- East Baltimore Residents, including adolescents and Young Adults

# What is the YO! Program?

- Serves youth ages 16-24
- Classes and tutorials to support academic achievement
- Assistance enrolling in college
- Clubs to support job seekers and the newly employed
- Career training classes
- Internet access
- Recreational activities
- Assistance with substance abuse or mental health issues



# Project Initiation:

## How Was Mental Health Focus Chosen?

- Advisory Board, comprised of key stakeholders, worked in collaboration with CAH to develop three data collection activities:
  1. Health screens with YO members
  2. Focus groups with YO Members
  3. Interviews with YO Case Advocates and Leadership

# Interpretation of Data and Prioritization of Mental Health

- Summaries of collected data provided to Advisory Board
- Series of meetings to discuss and interpret findings and prioritize future directions
- Ultimately, Advisory Board decided on mental health as focus for subsequent work

# What Has Emerged...

## the HOPE Project

- Center for Adolescent Health's Core Research Project
- Multi-component project aimed at promoting mental health status and access for adolescents and young adults in employment and training programs

# HOPE Project Components

1. Mental health screening
2. Support group network led by the Peer Leadership Group (PLG)
3. Training for YO! staff advocates
4. Assessment of community mental health providers

# Future Directions

- Robert Wood Johnson Local Initiative Funding Partner grant submitted to sustain and bolster health screening, staff training, and provision of mental health services
- National Institute of Mental Health grant (R34) submitted to conduct a randomized controlled trial determining the efficacy of the peer support group on depressive symptoms and depressive episodes
- Dissemination of project components to Westside YO program and other employment/training programs

# HOPE Project Team

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