

Boys Don't Cry: Why we should be talking about mental health with Black men

Posted At : April 30, 2018 5:25 PM | Posted By : Mavis Carr

Related Categories: News

By Tahshea LaBrew

It is no secret that life is rough for Black men and for people who suffer from mental illness.

The intersection of mental illness and the black man was the theme of the stage production "Boys Don't Cry" written and directed by Timea Whitsley and Brooklyn Baker, sponsored by The Greer Dawson Student Leadership Program.

There are four main characters and each is a young, black, male, college student going through their own unique problems regarding mental health.

Writer and director Brooklyn Baker gave feedback on the subject of the play in the student center theatre. "The reason why there are four main characters is so that it could represent four different types of men. At Hampton University the ratio is 12 women to 1 guy so we really wanted to touch on a subject that would really just resonate with black men specifically. So we really wanted to touch on mental health in the black community. A lot of black men told me that it resonated with them."

Erlanger A. Turner, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Psychology at the University of Houston-Downtown shared information on this subject. "In the wake of increasing injustice related to police aggression and brutality there is growing concern about the impact of these events on mental health. A study published in the American Journal of Public Health noted that those who reported more police contact experienced more symptoms of anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder. However, few Black men seek mental health care. Black men may avoid seeking mental health treatment due to stigma, mistrust of providers, or lack of culturally-informed care."

Because most students at Hampton University, where the play was performed, are women, many events, panel discussions, and campaigns are geared towards women's issues. The campus doesn't have many events regarding black men and their struggles however, this event was an exception. Despite how noisy the environment was, one junior mathematics major spoke about his experience with mental health after the positively received stage production.

"I've struggled with depression for most of my life. It's a lot to talk about honestly," he said "There's always this kind of air of cowardice that's shoved on men with depression or suicidal thoughts. Like you aren't brave or strong if you think about taking your own life. It's never made sense or been helpful to me."

"In general, men in society are taught to be very emotionless, especially with each other. You're seen as weak or gay or feminine otherwise. As a result, I don't trust 90% of people with my thoughts or emotions. People don't

understand me or seem to care too much to try so I stopped trying years ago."

The student's statement described hypermasculinity.

According to Britannica.com, Hypermasculinity is a "sociological term denoting exaggerated forms of masculinity, virility, and physicality."

According to strengths and weaknesses of the young Black men, masculinities, and mental health (YBMen) Facebook project, An initial exploration of what 'mental health' means to young black men, Journal of Men's Health and Gender and Huffingtonpost. "Studies show that Black men often are socialized or grow up in homes where masculinity is emphasized and men are not encouraged to talk about their feelings or emotions."

"Research shows that African Americans often under-utilize therapy compared to White counterparts. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, 18.6% of African Americans report living with a mental health condition but only 16.9% report using mental health treatment."

Having a mental illness has a negative connotation. More black men should seek help and not just ignore it and refuse to address or even acknowledge it. The play "Boys Don't Cry" opened a discussion that should not end soon.