

# Keepin' it Real: Centering the Voices of Young Adults in Mental Health Policy Formulation

CCRY Spring 2017 Meeting  
Washington, DC



# This Presentation

- Summarizes preliminary findings
  - Focus group conducted with urban young men
  - Analysis of National Data from SAMHSA 2015 National Survey on Drug Use and Health

# Mental Health Defined



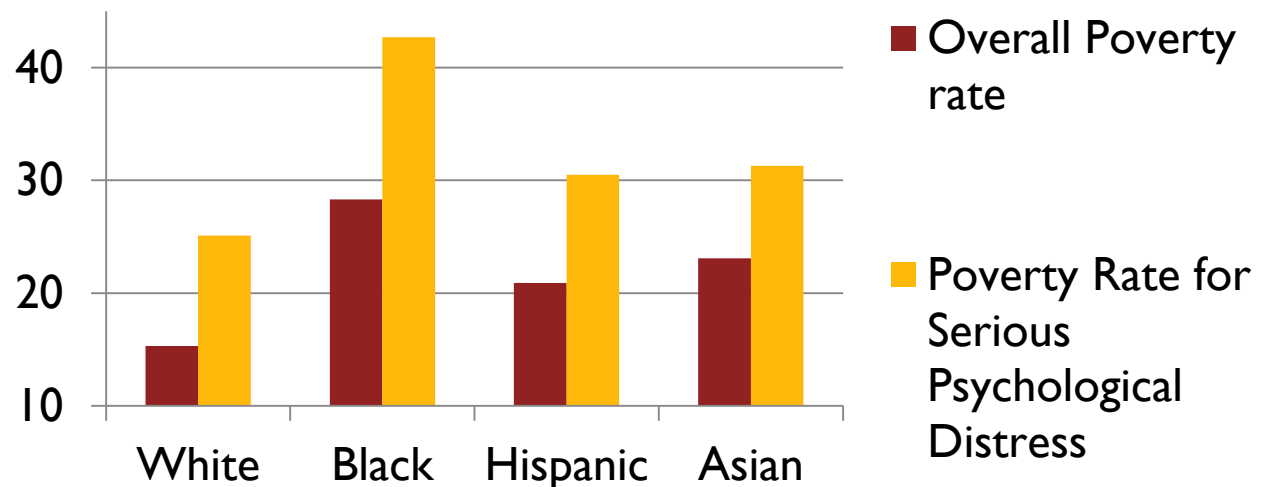
- Independence
- Stability
- Identity
- Success
- Thoughts
- Motivation
- Positive Pathways
- Strength
- Aspiration
- Self Improvement
- Learning
- Opportunity
- Choice
- Priorities
- Self-understanding
- Self-discovery
- Racial identity
- Good, focused mind
- Values
- Lifespan

# Mental Health Defined

- Context from National Data
  - Nearly 21% of poor young adults report experiencing “Serious Psychological Distress” within the last year.
  - Poor white young adults (26.1%) are more likely to report psychological distress than young people of color(16-18%)

# Mental Health Defined

- The poverty rate for young adults who experience psychological distress (28.5%) is higher than that for young adults overall (19%)
- The poverty rates are particularly high for young people of color who experience psychological distress



# Mental Health Defined

- 22.3% of poor young adults report experiencing “any mental illness” within the last year
  - The rate for poor white young adults (26.9%) is higher than that of Black, (14.8%) and Hispanic (20.4%) young adults
  - Young women (26.1%) demonstrate higher rates than young men (18%)

# Mental Health Defined

- 4.5% of poor young adults report that they have experienced “serious mental illness” within the last year
- This rate is not substantially different from the rate for young people of all income levels in this age range (5%)
- The rate for poor white young adults (6.6%) is twice that of Black, (2.7%) Hispanic (3.0%), and other Youth of Color (3.3%)

# Substance Abuse as a Salient Challenge

- Substance use and abuse described as pervasive
- References to a range of substances, from alcohol and marijuana to crack, cocaine, prescription pain killers and over the counter medications
- Fostered by a host of environmental factors, and acts as a major barrier to employment



# Substance Abuse as a Salient Challenge

“Then you have certain people that wants to stop, but the situation they in, like they’re living with someone and that person smokes, and they can’t leave because they basically have no where else to go. So they forced to be inside that type of environment.”

-Focus Group Participant

# Substance Abuse as a Salient Challenge

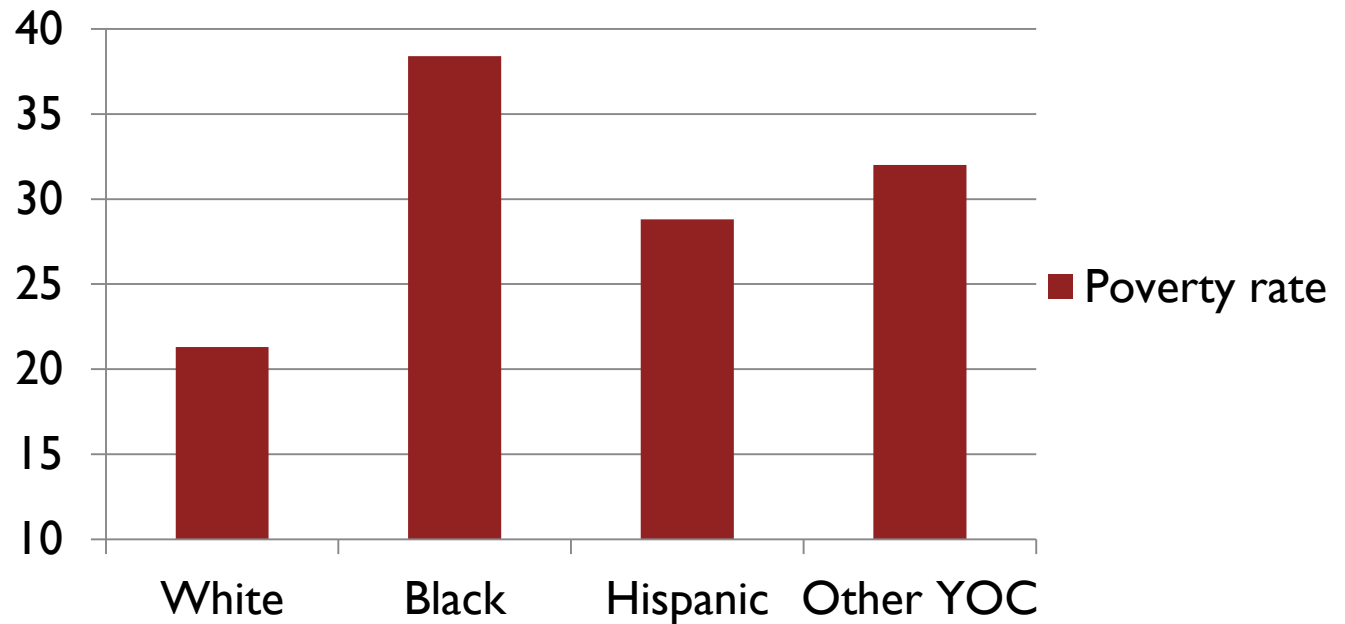
- Illicit drug and alcohol **use** is a common experience amongst low-income young people
  - Nearly 74% of poor young adults ages 18-25 report having used alcohol or illicit drugs at some point within the last year
  - Rates are higher for white young adults (nearly 80%) than young adults of color

# Substance Abuse as a Salient Challenge

- Illicit drug and alcohol **abuse** is far less common
  - 5.3% of poor young adults report alcohol or illicit drug abuse within the last year
  - White young adults experience drug and alcohol abuse rates (7%) 1.5-2 times higher than youth of color.

# Substance Abuse as a Salient Challenge

- Despite white young adults using and abusing substances at higher rates than young adults of color, young adults of color who use/abuse substances are poor at much higher rates.



# Greatest Threats to Young Adult Mental Health

- Community Violence

“I’m not gonna even lie, this week from Monday till probably yesterday I heard gunshots every day.”

-Focus Group Participant

“Not even just this week. Past three months ...I been hearing it. People dying here, people dying there. People dying this place. People dying that place. Then when I came back it got worse. It was like, ‘Oh, this person just died.’ Like three people died in one day. Off this gun violence.”

-Focus Group Participant

# Greatest Threats to Young Adult Mental Health

- Financial Strain

“So then, a new car and note, insurance, rent, light bill, bill, bill, bill. All that just build and build bigger. And you know it wasn't good. I couldn't handle it no more so I came back home.”

-Focus Group Participant

“It's very very expensive. And when it comes to government funding, or you try to get government housing, the places that they put you in, so it's not like, it's my sense of being liveable. The area's bad, a lot of killing. That's usually where they going to try to put you at. They not gonna put you in no decent area.”

-Focus Group Participant

# Effective Mental Health Supports

- **Community-Based Programs**
  - Provide financial assistance
  - Teach new skills/provide information
  - Give young people “something to do”
  - Teach morals/values
  - Brings together young adults with shared experiences
  - Caring adults who are relatable because of shared background

# Effective Mental Health Supports

“We sat in a circle and basically, we all sat around in a circle and we basically discussed some of the issues going on with all of us, and we come to find out that some of us had similar problems, some of us different...They basically took everyone’s situation and found like the common denominator or source and basically that’s what we worked on sitting here.”

-Focus Group Participant



# Effective Mental Health Supports

- 12% of poor young adults received any formal mental health services in the past year
  - White young adults receive mental health treatment 1.5 to 2 times the rate of youth of color
- 8 % of poor young adults- more than three quarters of a million young people- report that they needed mental health treatment in the last year, but did not receive it

# Health Insurance Seen as Supporting Physical Health

- 2/3 of focus group participants had health insurance coverage
- Aligns with findings from national data:
  - 78% of poor young adults report that they have health insurance
  - Disparities by race and gender, with Black (65.9%) and Hispanic (59.7%) young men insured at lower rates than white young men (81.3%) and young women of all races (82.3%)
  - Black (46.2%) and Hispanic (42.1%) young adults are disproportionately likely to be insured through Medicaid compared with white young adults (26.6%)

# Health Insurance Seen as Supporting Physical Health

- When asked about health insurance coverage, focus group participants focused on:
  - Annual Physicals
  - Dental procedures
  - Minor and Serious Injuries

# Health Insurance Seen as Supporting Physical Health

- Perceived disparities in access to and quality of treatment based on having insurance or not

“Anyplace you be trying to go to, you try to get like health services and you don’t got insurance, they don’t give you no attention.”

-Focus Group Participant

“I probably could have a stab wound and he could have a little cut on his eye, because he got insurance they going to look at him first.”

-Focus Group Participant

# Health Insurance Seen as Supporting Physical Health

- Overwhelmingly, participants were uncertain about what their health insurance covered, why it was canceled, and how to get coverage

“To get it back, I think I have to go back and try to apply for it or something like that. I’m not really sure.”

-Focus Group Participant

# Health Insurance Seen as Supporting Physical Health

- Once again, this focus on physical health and uncertainty about covered services is supported by national data:
  - 25% of white young adults believe that their health insurance covers mental health treatment, but between 5 and 10 percent of Black and Hispanic young adults believe that their health insurance covers mental health services
  - 10% of white young adults believe that their health insurance covers drug or alcohol abuse treatment; between 5 and 10 % of Black and Hispanic young adults believe the same
  - 15-20% of poor young adults reported that they were “unsure” as to whether their health insurance covered these services.

# Questions/Discussion

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