Go-Throughs to Get Through:
Low-income Young Adults and Mental Health

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This Presentation

• Selected findings
  – Focus group conducted with 26 African-American young adults
  – Analysis of National Data from SAMHSA 2015 National Survey on Drug Use and Health
How do young adults define mental health?

Mental health is defined by strengths, not problems. Young adults shared an affirmative vision of wellness that includes positive attributes, behaviors, and values.

“Things gonna get better. You feel me?”
-Rural Focus Group Participant
Go-Throughs to Get Through: Low-Income Young Adults and Mental Health

Young adults living in poverty face high exposure to “go-throughs,” including structural disadvantages and trauma. Percent of youth affected by mental illness in the last year:

- **26.9%** WHITE
- **20.4%** HISPANIC
- **14.8%** BLACK
- **22.8%** OTHER YOC

They frequently “get through” these challenges without formal mental health supports.

8% of poor young adults (more than 340,000 young people) needed mental health treatment in the last year but did not receive it.

Young adults who experience psychological distress are more likely to be poor.

- **White**: 15.3% 42.7%
- **Black**: 28.3% 30.5%
- **Hispanic**: 20.9% 31.3%
- **Asian**: 23.1%

Substance use is common among young adults, but substance abuse is rare.

- **White young adults** experience drug and alcohol abuse rates (7%) 1.5-2 times higher than youth of color.

Low-income young adults who have insurance don’t know it covers mental health services.

- **78%** of poor young adults report that they have health insurance.
- **55%** report that they have health insurance through Medicaid.

15% of poor young adults are unsure whether their health insurance covers mental health services.

Nearly 1 in 4 (22%) white young adults believe that their health insurance covers mental health treatment.

* Percent young adults experiencing psychological distress in the last year

Source:

CLASP | clasp.org | #GoThroughs2GetThrough
Psychological Distress and Poverty

Young adults who experience psychological distress are more likely to be poor.

- **White**: 15.3% (25.1% poverty rate)
- **Black**: 28.3% (42.7% poverty rate)
- **Hispanic**: 30.5%
- **Asian**: 31.3% (23.1% poverty rate)

Poverty rate for young adults experiencing serious psychological distress:
- **17.3%** poor young men experienced serious psychological distress in the last year.
- **24.2%** poor young women experienced serious psychological distress in the last year.
Substance Use and Abuse

Substance use is common among young adults, but substance abuse is rare.

White young adults experience drug and alcohol abuse rates (7%) 1.5-2 times higher than youth of color.

*Abuse:* use of alcohol or illicit drugs that leads to clinically significant impairment or distress | *Use:* any use of alcohol or illicit drugs in the last year
Health Insurance and Mental Health

Low-income young adults who have insurance don’t know it covers mental health services.

Young adults + health insurance
- 78% of poor young adults report that they have health insurance.
- 35% report that they have health insurance through Medicaid.

15% of poor young adults are unsure whether their health insurance covers mental health services.

Nearly 1 in 4 (22%) white young adults believe that their health insurance covers mental health treatment.

Black (46.2%) and Hispanic (42.1%) young adults are disproportionately likely to be insured through Medicaid compared with white young adults (26.6%).
“Just everything bro. It’s like everything, it’s like every time something go negative I just think like if that [expletive] had never happened I wouldn’t have been here now. I could have been somewhere else doing better, probably going to college right now.”

-Rural Focus Group Participant