

Take charge of your health today. Be informed. Be involved.

Mental Health and Young Adults



ESTHER BUSH

This month, the “Take Charge of Your Health Today” page focuses on mental health and how it affects young adults. Erricka Hager and Bee Schindler, community engagement coordinators, University of Pittsburgh’s Clinical and Translational Science Institute, and Esther L. Bush, president and CEO of the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh, spoke about this topic.

EH: Happy New Year, Ms. Bush! I hope you had a great holiday season. I love the beginning of the year because it’s a great time to set new goals for the year. It’s also a great time to start taking care of yourself physically and mentally. Thank you for taking some time to talk with us about a growing public health concern.

EB: Happy New Year to you, too, Erricka and Bee. Not only is it a new year but it is a new decade. I’m excited about this new year and decade, as well as discussing this topic with the both of you. As you both know, we have multiple leadership programs for young adults at the Urban League. The topic of mental health and young adults is not only timely, but it is necessary.

BS: Yes, depression rates appear to be on the rise for teenagers and young adults in the United States. Dr. Cecile Ladouceur, associate professor of psychiatry and of psychology, and director of the Cognitive-Affective Neuroscience and Development Lab at the University of Pittsburgh, agrees that depression rates are on the rise. But she also mentions that simply speaking with a health care professional won’t capture everyone who is experiencing mental illness.

EB: Wow. Thank you for that information, Bee. I didn’t realize so many young folks were being diagnosed with depression. I also didn’t know adolescent girls were twice as likely to be diagnosed with depression as adolescent boys. It is unfortunate that the needs of young adults aren’t being met. We often encourage our readers to have conversations with their health care providers. However, if they aren’t fully being treated, how can we ensure they are getting the care they need?

EH: Yes, Ms. Bush. Interestingly, Dr. Ladouceur’s work focuses on addressing some of those gaps in care. They hope that findings from the Mood and Brain Circuitry in Adolescence (MBA) study will help identify new intervention strategies. These strategies will educate health care professionals on how to best identify depression in adolescents before symptoms appear.

EB: What is one way we can partner with Dr. Ladouceur’s team to help educate our readers about this growing concern?

BS: To sign up for the research study, you can search the Pitt+Me registry for the MBA study or call 1-866-438-8230. But, if you are in need of support now, I really like how local crisis interventions—like Resolve Crisis Center—want folks to understand that people should be able to name their own crises; there are no set boxes for mental health. If you feel like you are in need of immediate services, reach out. Resolve’s child and adolescent crisis team also helps young folks and family members with coping skills and teaches ways to prevent a crisis by looking for triggers. Resolve can be reached by calling 1-888-796-8226.

EB: What a great way for us to kick off this New Year, Erricka and Bee. I’m so glad we are talking about this at the start of 2020. I encourage each reader to review and access the resources listed on this page. If you have any questions, the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh has a Health Education Office where you can get answers to your questions and be connected to these resources as well.

EH: Thank you for your time, Ms. Bush. I wish you and all of our readers a happy and healthy 2020. Next month, we continue talking about the importance of naming racism and how it contributes to poor health outcomes in the United States.



Adolescent depression and mood symptoms

If 100 young people were in a room, 20 of them would be affected by depression. This rate continues to increase according to Cecile D. Ladouceur, PhD, associate professor of psychiatry, School of Medicine, and of psychology, Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences, University of Pittsburgh.

But talking to a health care professional may not capture everyone experiencing mental health issues. Dr. Ladouceur wants to make the process of identifying mental health issues easier for providers.

While 20 percent of all youths are depressed, it does not look the same for each person. About a third experience mania symptoms that look like being impulsive and risky, and can increase the possibility of suicide. When young people have these mixed features, special treatment is needed but can often go undetected in the typical clinical process.

Researchers with the Mood and Brain Circuitry in Adolescent (MBA) study are recruiting children who are not currently on psychiatric medicine.

“The goal of the research project is to define the brain and behavioral aspects of adolescent depression and to examine how these are related to mood symptoms over two years,” says Dr. Ladouceur. “We are looking at how the brain reacts to happy and rewarding information, as well as how adolescents sleep and their symptoms change over time.”

Dr. Ladouceur hopes that findings from the study will help create new methods to identify which young people with depression might experience mania. Then the research team can provide strategies even before these symptoms emerge.



CECILE D. LADOUCEUR, PHD

Two areas, in particular, are getting the attention of Dr. Ladouceur and others: Young people who identify as women and adolescents who are not white. Dr. Ladouceur is also interested in spaces where those two identities intersect.

“The rate of depression, particularly in adolescent girls, has increased dramatically over the past couple of decades,” says Dr. Ladouceur, adding, “Yet, we know very little about the cause of depression and which medications and psychological treatments are best suited for the specific type of mood symptoms.”

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention state that the number of all children age 6 through 17 who have ever been diagnosed with either anxiety or depression has increased from 5.4 percent in 2003 to 8 percent in 2007 to 8.4 percent in 2012.

The MBA study team says that many racial and ethnic groups have similar types of mental health issues as white people. However, the effects of mental health problems in former groups may last longer. The MBA team is intentionally recruiting youths of color at or above the percentage of those who live in the region.

As a clinical child psychologist, Dr. Ladouceur wants to do research so that young people have a better chance of avoiding long-term developmental effects. Currently, the team is educating local therapists about the different types of teen mood symptoms. They hope to enhance the tools therapists currently have that identify depression in teens.

“Advances in neuroscience research have shown that the brain systems involved in mood regulation undergo important maturational changes during adolescence through adulthood,” says Ladouceur. “This means that adolescence may be the ideal time to intervene in order to have longer-lasting effects on mental health.”



AYISAT BISIRIYU, 14, a student at Winchester Thurston School, wants to raise awareness and open discussion surrounding mental health issues that can affect teenagers.

Bisiriyu points to social media as one of the reasons that some young people feel pressure and experience feelings of inadequacy.

Source: <https://www.publicsource.org/mental-illness-and-teens-its-hard-to-tell-who-is-joking-and-who-is-crying-for-help-whats-my-responsibility/> (Photo by Maranie Rae Staab/PublicSource/File)

Resources for Teens and Families

LOCAL:

re:olve crisis network
1-888-796-8226

If you need help and want to contact local services, contact the re:olve crisis network. Re:olve crisis offers crisis counseling and support, referrals, and intervention services 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The hotline, mobile crisis unit, and walk-in center are all free to residents of Allegheny county.

PA 2-1-1 | United Way
2-1-1

Connects people of Southwestern Pennsylvania to housing, community, health, and disaster services. The service is available by phone or online, offers 24/7 access and is confidential.

NATIONAL:

National Suicide Hotline:
1-800-SUICIDE (784-2433) or
1-800-273-TALK (8255)

Both numbers are toll-free, 24-hour, confidential hotlines which connect you to a trained counselor at the nearest suicide crisis center.

Join us for Dinner & Dialogue to explore links between racism and health

Who: The Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh, New Pittsburgh Courier, UPMC Center for Engagement & Inclusion, University of Pittsburgh’s Clinical and Translational Science Institute (CTSI), and YOU.

What: We invite you to join in a conversation getting at the root causes of issues related to race. We hope to think about the effects of racism on health and mental health. Specifically, we are hoping to discuss ways to address and reduce racial disparities. The floor will be open to robust dialogue. The free and open to the public Dinner and Dialogue series will discuss Allegheny County-specific health disparities and current research and resource opportunities. Researchers and commu-

nity leaders will be on hand to present findings and explore solutions. Dinner and child care will be provided.

Where: Community Engagement Center in Homewood at 622 North Homewood Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15208

When: February 20, 2020 from 5:30-7:00 p.m.

Why: This unique event seeks to boost community health education and advocacy, increase diverse participation in clinical and translational research and encourage individuals to become empowered and actively engaged in their own health and well-being.

RSVP to bos23@pitt.edu with your name, number in your party, and if you have any food allergies. Please let us know if you will require child care.