

151st Session of THE KENTUCKY ANNUAL CONFERENCE
13th Episcopal District
African Methodist Episcopal Church
September 27-30, 2018
Embry Chapel AMEC (Elizabethtown), Host Church
Rev. Stephanie Raglin, Host Pastor
Bishop Jeffrey N. Leath, Presiding Prelate
Dr. Susan J. Leath, M.D., Episcopal Supervisor
Rev. William Easley, Presiding Elder
Rev. James "Book" Smith, Associate Presiding Elder

Health & Wellness Report

STRESS & ITS IMPACT ON OVERALL PHYSICAL & MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Black/African Americans are experiencing increasingly high levels of stress today. Stressors include health and economic disparities, social discrimination and injustices. Stress affects overall quality of life. There is strong association or link between stress and chronic illnesses such as diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity, heart disease and cancer. Diabetes is one of the leading causes of illness and death for African Americans. Likewise, African Americans have a high prevalence of high blood pressure as compared with other racial and ethnic groups.

Overall, black people are 10% more likely to report experiencing serious psychological distress than white people, according to the Department of Health and Human Services of Minority Health. The black community especially Black/ African American men wrestle with the stigma of seeking help for mental distress, which in turn affects their coping behaviors. Black/African American men are particularly concerned about stigma.

Black women also struggle with their mental health, consistently reporting higher feelings of sadness, hopelessness, worthlessness, and the sense that everything is an effort than white women do. Black women are frequently the pillars of their community, taking care of everyone's health but their own. However, it is very important for women to practice self-care and not forget about themselves when trying to be so strong. One of the most harmful blind spots women have is a tendency to be too generous. This could be too generous with our time, our availability, and our resources. We are so focused on giving that we lose sight of when all our giving is depleting us.

This is not suggesting that you need to become less generous and more selfish. Just the opposite. You must appreciate that giving more to yourself is one of the most unselfish and necessary steps to take to be the rock for those who rely on you. By saying no out of love, you will not feel obligated to pay or do for what others want.

As you begin to take control of all aspects of your own life, you will become calmer, more positive, and stronger. It improves the quality of your life, placing you less at risk for chronic illnesses and that in turn gives you the power to do more, and be more for others.

From a Health and Wellness perspective, how might churches play a role in helping to reduce congregants' stress? Church relationships represent an important stress-coping resource for African Americans. Those who do not live near family, or who are estranged from family, consider church members to be their substitute family. Church members can be a source of social support for this population. Interventions such as advice and encouragement, companionship, assistance during illness, prayers, and financial aid are all a source of social support to help relieve stress. African Americans rely on the church and church members for assistance, in part because of difficulties accessing formal resources due to social and economic barriers.

Respectfully Submitted,

LaJava N. Chenault, MSN, RN

Health and Wellness Director

Lexington District of the Kentucky Annual Conference