

Black men need special attention from social workers to deal with their needs

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Among disadvantaged people in the United States, the most needy and least helped are probably African American men, according to a new book from the University of Chicago's School of Social Service Administration.

Black men suffer in a variety of ways, including being stereotyped as reckless and having little regard for their children. They are also disadvantaged because changes in the economy have depleted the number of well-paying, manual labor jobs, said Waldo E. Johnson Jr., Associate Professor at SSA, who is the editor of [Social Work With African American Males: Health, Mental Health and Social Policy](#), recently published by Oxford University Press.

“Contemporary characterizations and depictions suggest that African American males harbor a lifelong disregard for their own personal development, and a lack of commitment to their loved ones and society in general,” a societal [attitude](#) that keeps them from being helped, he said.

Most African American men do not fit the popular [stereotype](#) and fulfill their responsibilities to their families and society, but the stereotype persists, fueled in some ways by media images, Johnson said. But the problems they face are real, and social workers should feel challenged to put the tools and resources of their profession at work to help black men in need, he said.

The book is a collection of studies, which details the disadvantages that [black men](#) face and suggests ways they can be helped. The contributors are leading scholars in social work and other related fields from around the country. Among the findings reported in the book:

- Black male youths are likely to grow up in single-parent homes. The boys often don't have fathers residing in the home to serve as role models. Without paternal involvement, boys are more likely to develop ideas about what it means to be a man based on negative media portrayals and depictions, which leads them to be emotionally uninvolved and apprehensive.
- Black males, even as boys, are more likely than other male peers to suffer from stress-induced depression and other physical and mental health problems that may result in homicidal and suicidal behaviors as they mature. Their health problems continue throughout their lives with higher incidences of depression, high blood pressure, heart problems and prostate cancer. African American men have a life expectancy similar to that of men in developing countries.

- Black boys are more likely to experience difficulty in school and are less likely to graduate than any other group.
- African American males' socioeconomic status contributes significantly to their likelihood of being arrested and spending time in prison.
- African American males have longer periods of joblessness and lower salaries due to underemployment than men from other demographic groups.

Despite their problems, few programs are designed specifically to help black males, and social workers may not view them as part the families and communities that the workers serve, with the result that black males' individual needs go unaddressed.

“It is critical to utilize both [social work](#) research and practice to articulate these and other challenges that adversely impact the physical, mental, and social health and well-being of African American males,” Johnson said.

In his book, Johnson proposes that effective programs need to replicated, such as well run after-school programs that promote educational achievement and provide sports and other outlets for boys. Social service providers need to open up programs for fathers as well.

There are also some public policy steps we can take, said Johnson, who calls them the “Plan for Success.” They include establishing an independent education and wellness plan for every African American male born in this country, providing a school-to-work link that enhances opportunities for African American men to work and finally, giving African American men access to public housing.

“Many communities discourage single men from living in public housing, which signals negative value and worth as individuals and members of families who need places to live,” Johnson said. The plan can help men move forward and become fully participating members of society.

Provided by University of Chicago

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