

## Louisiana Weekly Examines Suicide, Mental Illness Among Blacks

10 Apr 2008

The *Louisiana Weekly* on Sunday examined suicide and depression in the black community. According to the *Weekly*, "Still suffering from the vestiges of slavery and still targets of institutionalized racism and discrimination today, with health and economic disparities in their disfavor in almost all societal categories, blacks are the first group of people who need to seek help for possible mental illness and depression, yet the last ones to get it."

A 2003 report by NIH found that on average, one black person dies by suicide every 4.5 hours in the U.S. Researchers in a study published in the *Journal of Black Psychology* in 2006 said that suicide can be attributed to hopelessness, adding that a better understanding of racial differences in hopelessness and suicide could improve suicide intervention methods and reduce suicides among blacks. According to the *Weekly*, there is a stereotype in the black community that blacks are unlikely to commit suicide. Karen Hollie, a pastor and former psychiatrist, said, "We have a different set of coping skills that we employ for a lot of things," adding, "The helplessness and the hopelessness is not the same. We seem to have some other avenues that we employ, and some just say we have some economic implications for it that makes a difference."

Author and Harvard Medical School psychiatrist Alvin Poussaint said blacks "see mental disorder and depression as a sign of personal weakness or moral failure." In the book *Lay My Burden Down*, Poussaint and co-author Amy Alexander write that blacks downplay issues of depression and mental illness, which can lead to suicide (Jackson, *Louisiana Weekly*, 4/6).

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