

Mental Health Introduction

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Although it is sometimes easy to overlook mental health problems in the context of clearly observable physical sickness and behavioral risk factors, mental illness has a devastating impact on Mississippi's children. In 2004, it was reported that almost 52,000 children in Mississippi, aged 9 to 17, had severe and chronic behavioral, psychiatric, or emotional disorders; around 78,000 additional children were thought to need "short term mental health intervention[s]."¹ Mental health problems also affect a significant number of adults in Mississippi -- in 2007, 34.5% of adults in the state reported having poor mental health.² Importantly, the mental health issues of these adults can, in turn, have an adverse impact on their families -- in particular, the children of mothers who suffer from depression face increased risk of a wide variety of health problems, including growth retardation,³ behavioral problems,⁴ and anxiety.⁵ Mental illness is also common among children. Nationally, more than 8% of adolescents have had at least one major episode of depression in the past year.⁶ In 2005, suicide was the third leading cause of death in Mississippi among youth aged 11 to 18.⁷ Serious mental illness can develop as early as age seven,⁸ but despite the severe consequences of mental illness, it is estimated that at least 75%

¹ Mississippi Families as Allies for Children's Mental Health, "Children's Mental Health Facts," 2004. *Available at:* http://www.msfaacmh.org/fact-childrens_mental_health_facts.php.

² Kaiser State Health Facts, "Poor Mental Health Among Adults -- Mississippi," 2007. *Available at:* <http://www.statehealthfacts.org/profileind.jsp?ind=93&cat=2&rgn=26>.

³ Atif Rahman et al., "Impact of Maternal Depression on Infant Nutritional Status and Illness: A Cohort Study," *Arch Gen Psychiatry*, Vol. 61, Sept. 2004, p. 946. *Available at:* <http://archpsyc.ama-assn.org/>.

⁴ Early Childhood Iowa, "Maternal Depression Screening, Referrals, and Care," Winter 2006, Issue Brief 6, p. 1. *Available at:* <http://www.state.ia.us/earlychildhood/docs/MDIssueBriefFinal.pdf>.

⁵ Urmila Parlikar, "Longer Lasting and More Severe Maternal Depression Increases Risk of Child's Depression," 2004. *Available at:* <http://www.mbcm.org/healthgate/GetHGContent.aspx?token=9c315661-83b7-472d-a7ab-bc8582171f86&chunkid=33453>.

⁶ Childhealth.gov: Forum on Child and Family Statistics, "America's Children 2009, list of tables." *Available at:* <http://www.childstats.gov/americaschildren/tables.asp>.

⁷ Teen Screen: National Center for Mental Health Checkups at Columbia University, "Mississippi Youth Mental Health Fact Sheet," July 2008. *Available at:* <http://www.teenscreen.org/mississippi-youth-mental-health-fact-sheet>.

⁸ Rachel Masi and Janice Cooper, "Children's Mental Health: Facts for Policymakers," National Center for Children in Poverty. Nov. 2006, p. 1. *Available at:* http://nccp.org/publications/pdf/text_687.pdf.

of children do not receive necessary mental health care.⁹ In order to protect the long-term health of the population of Mississippi, it is crucial to diagnose and treat mental health issues as they develop in children.

Mississippi has already begun to combat childhood mental illness. The Mississippi Department of Mental Health operates two in-patient mental health facilities that are available to youth, as well as a Specialized Treatment Facility for the Seriously Emotionally Disturbed.¹⁰ In addition, there are fifteen privately run, state-supported community mental health centers in Mississippi.¹¹ The community mental health centers often provide services such as testing, therapy, and case management. Mississippi's Medicaid program also helps finance certain mental health services.¹²

Despite the mental health infrastructure already in place in Mississippi, significant problems remain in the provision of mental health services to the state's children. In 2007 alone, 8,000 to 16,000 Mississippi children who were identified as having serious mental illness received no care through the community mental health system.¹³ That figure excludes children who suffer from undiagnosed mental health problems, so the lack of care is even greater than this statistic suggests. Furthermore, children who do receive care often receive disjointed treatment, with a

⁹ Rachel Masi and Janice Cooper, "Children's Mental Health: Facts for Policymakers," National Center for Children in Poverty. Nov. 2006, p. 1. *Available at:* http://nccp.org/publications/pdf/text_687.pdf.

¹⁰ The Mississippi Department of Mental Health, "DMH: Mental Health Services," 2007. *Available at:* http://www.dmh.state.ms.us/mental_health_facilities_children.htm.

¹¹ The Mississippi Department of Mental Health, "DMH: Children and Youth Mental Health Services," 2007. *Available at:* http://www.dmh.state.ms.us/children_community_services.htm.

¹² Mississippi Division of Medicaid, "Get Connected with your Mental Health Services," 2009. *Available at:* <http://www.medicaid.ms.gov/MentalHealthServicesDetails.aspx>.

¹³ Mississippi Families as Allies, Inc., "Mississippi Families as Allies for Children's Mental Health," 2009. *Available at:* tacenter.net/state_profiles/mississippi/SFN%20Presentation%20Template-%20MS%20x.ppt.

high rate of turnover for their health care providers,¹⁴ inadequate emergency services,¹⁵ and insufficient long-term, comprehensive treatment plans.¹⁶ In order to better serve the needs of its children, Mississippi must provide more support for families experiencing mental health problems.

¹⁴ Mississippi Department of Mental Health, “FY 2009 Mississippi State Plan for Community Mental Health Services,” 2008. *Available at:*

<http://www.dmh.state.ms.us/pdf/FY2009MississippiStatePlanCommunityMentalHealthServices.pdf>.

¹⁵ Conversation with David Cook, Clinical Director of Region One Community Mental Health Center, Feb. 27, 2009.

¹⁶ Mississippi Department of Mental Health, “FY 2009 Mississippi State Plan for Community Mental Health Services,” 2008. *Available at:*

<http://www.dmh.state.ms.us/pdf/FY2009MississippiStatePlanCommunityMentalHealthServices.pdf>.