

Is it possible that mental illnesses documented in state and federal prisons in America overlap dimensions of internalized racism which for blacks' issue from more than 400 years of oppression? If the answer is 'yes', might this inform a new genre of interventions that enable more successful reintegration into communities they call home?

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Relationship between Mental Health Symptoms and Markers of Internalized Racism

NAMI Mental Health Symptoms	Published Markers of Internalized Racism				
	Depression	Anxiety	Stress	Hostility	Addictions
Excessive worrying or fear	X	X	X		
Feeling excessively sad or low	X				
Confused thinking or problems concentrating and learning		X	X		
Prolonged or strong feelings of irritability or anger			X	X	
Extreme mood changes	X				
Avoiding friends and social activities	X				
Difficulties understanding or relating to other people	X		X	X	
Changes in sleeping habits or feeling tired and low energy	X	X	X		
Changes in eating habits such as increased hunger	X	X	X		
Abuse of substances like alcohol or drugs	X	X	X		X
Thinking about suicide	X				
Inability to handle daily problems and stress	X	X	X		
intense fear or concern with appearance.		X	X		
Hyperactive behavior		X			
Frequent disobedience or aggression			X	X	
Excessive worry or anxiety		X			
Frequent temper tantrums			X	X	
Multiple physical ailments without obvious causes	X	X	X	X	
Difficulties understanding or relating to other people	X	X	X	X	
Increased hunger or lack of appetite	X		X		
Feeling tired and low energy	X		X		
Lack of insight—understanding things	X			X	
Sums	15	11	15	7	1

The National Alliance on Mental Health Illness (NAMI) identifies 10 warning signs of mental illness, all of which are tabularized in this table along with additional mental illness indicators provided on their website <https://www.nami.org/About-Mental-Illness/Warning-Signs-and-Symptoms>. On NAMI’s website, depression, anxiety, attentional disorders, and post-traumatic stress disorders were the most frequently identified mental illness challenges for males and females incarcerated in state and federal institutions. The Urban Institute (2015) found that nearly 50 percent of persons in prisons stand in need of treatment: <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/48981/2000173-The-Processing-and-Treatment-of-Mentally-Ill-Persons-in-the-Criminal-Justice-System.pdf>. Proportionately there are more blacks than whites in need of treatment: <https://www.vera.org/>.

Is it possible, then, that mental health challenges documented in state and federal prisons in America overlap dimensions of internalized racism which issue from more than 400 years of unrelenting oppression? From our still evolving review, it appears at this point that the answer may be ‘yes’ for incarcerated black males and females. It is also possible that (a) incarcerated blacks carry excessive burdens of Post-Traumatic Cultural Disorder (PTCD) linked in published studies to dysphoric symptoms and addictive behaviors and (b) interventions which are culturally corrective may not only diminish dysphoric symptoms and addictive behaviors but also enable more successful reintegration into communities they call home.