Study Recommends Mental Health Services at Job Placement Programs

**The Challenge:** In the United States, African-American men have the shortest life expectancy of all races. Many factors contribute to this, including history of incarceration, exposure to violence, racism, limited health care access, inadequate mental health support and stress. Researchers have linked socioeconomic status to poor health outcomes. As a group, African-American men face issues of employability in alarming numbers, thus making them more susceptible to poor health outcomes. Of the social determinants, perhaps none is more significant than employment.

**Project Goal:** The project sought to assess the needs of unemployed African-American men receiving services at the Milwaukee Area Workforce Investment Board (MAWIB), particularly non-custodial fathers enrolled in MAWIB’s transitional employment program. The assessment included a survey, in-depth interviews and focus groups that provided information from men about their physical, mental and emotional health as well as legal status. An advisory board reviewed and made recommendations for changes based on findings of the project team.

**Results:** Findings suggest that adverse childhood events such as physical, mental and emotional abuse; battered mothers; separation or divorce; early trauma; and stress were major contributors to unemployment among African-American men. They concluded that job placement programs working with African-American men who live in urban areas should consider incorporating behavioral and mental health services into their offerings. These programs should also look at the possibility of trauma-focused interventions. Equally valuable, the project made recommendations about integrating a common goal among many urban social service agencies to develop policies and strategies that decrease exposure to adverse childhood experiences.

MAWIB has secured funding from the Safer Foundation and through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act to plan a pilot project targeting young African-American men. The pilot project will test the implementation of the behavioral and mental health services and trauma interventions that were recommended as a result of this study.
