Written by Timothy Houston
Tuesday, 08 May 2012 16:43

With the recent death of Junior Seau, former professional football player, the subject of black suicides has again reared its ugly head. With other notable suicide deaths by Don Cornelius, Donny Hathaway, Phyllis Hyman, and Frankie Lymon, not including the untold number of those who never make the headlines, we are no longer able to deny its existence in our community. Suicide is an ugly reality in the black community that must be addressed through all of our public and private conversations and dialogues.

For decades, we took pride and comfort in the notion that "blacks don’t commit suicide, that’s a white folks' thing." After enduring the torture of slavery, the humiliation of segregation, and racially motivated violence and poverty, the notion that blacks didn't kill themselves was believed to be built in our DNA and our faith. Back then, we were always able to laugh or pray our way out of the worst adversity, but now suicide among blacks is rising at an alarming rate.

In March, a study published in Psychiatric Services, a journal of the American Psychiatric Association, warned that more young blacks are killing themselves. The study used data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Though the risk for suicide among young people is still greatest among young white males, recent CDC studies show that from 1980 through 1995, suicide rates increased most rapidly among young black males. For black males aged 15-19, the rate increased 105 percent. During the same period, the overall suicide rate for all persons of the same age increased only 11 percent.

Though CDC researchers gave no reason for the escalating deaths among our black youths, blacks of all ages are using suicide as a means of dealing with the pressures of life. Part of the reason for this rise could be attributed to depression. It is a leading indicator of suicide, but more than 60 percent of black don’t see it as illness and rarely get help for it. Depression is impacting the old and the young, and without a strong spiritual foundation, many of our youth are using drugs and alcohol as a means of self-medicating.

Some of the symptoms of suicide are depression, drug addiction, family history of suicide, and mental illness. Some of the socio-economic factors are unemployment, poverty, homelessness, discrimination, and physical or sexual abuse. One study found that a lack of social support, a deficit in feelings of belongingness and living alone were crucial predictors of a suicide attempt. If you are personally experiencing any of these symptoms, get help immediately. If you know

someone who is experiencing these symptoms, encourage them to do the same. The pressure of each day has the potential to carry them over the edge. No one should have to live with the regrets of being a day too late.

With more and more pressures placed on us every day, we need to bring this issue from the dark shadows of whispers and innuendos, to community and family led discussions in the light of today's reality. Our people are hurting, and it will be our eyes, ears, hands, and heart, that will help those who we love through this difficult period. The church and the Christian community have a key part to play in eradicating this ugly truth from our community. As we encounter those in our sphere of influence who are hurting, remind them that Jesus is the mender of a broken heart, and they can freely cast their cares upon him, for he cares for them. I believe that when a hurting person feels the unconditional love of God and healing touch of those closest to them, suicide no longer becomes an option.

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