

Understanding the mental health of African Americans

Only one quarter of African-Americans seek mental health care, compared to 40 percent of Caucasian people, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

Steven Kniffley Jr. spoke about the importance of mental health and its relation to the black community last week.

“Your mental health is equally as important as your physical health,” Kniffley said.

Kniffley’s talk, a part of the University of Toledo’s recognition of Black History Month, touched on the negative reputation emotional health receives between African-Americans and what individuals can do to help.

The presentation discussed the priority of reinventing ways the black community perceives the field of psychology and stressed the significance of psychological well-being.

Having written a book entitled, “Knowledge of Self: Understanding the Mind of the Black Male,” Kniffley specializes in examining what factors influence the poor perception of psychology and how it impedes care.

“There is a lack of awareness related to access of treatment when it comes to mental health,” Kniffley said.

Those in attendance recognized the value in the discussion and its importance within the UT community. African Americans are 20 percent more likely to experience serious mental health problems than the general population, according to the NAMI website.

“It’s an important thing to talk about,” said one community member. “Working in the criminal justice system, I see that

people need access to behavioral health rather than incarceration.”

Kniffley went on to mention key historical moments in the black community and how they have formed the current view on mental health.

“From the beginning, we [African-Americans] have sought to be psychologically free and it has always been pathologized,” Kniffley said.

African American Initiatives graduate assistant Kelley Webb saw the significance of Kniffley’s presentation.

“It is a conversation that needs to be had. He touched on a lot of pertinent things in the black community,” Webb said.

Kniffley closed with a simple call to action and equipped the room with a way to improve views on the field of psychological health.

“Listen. Ask what you can do to help,” Kniffley said.

UT offers counseling services to any regularly admitted UT student who is currently enrolled. The Counseling Center can be contacted at 419.530.2426.