Workshop 4A
What We Know and Don't Know: The State of Research on African American Marriages and Relationships

Moderator/Panelists:  
Lula Beatty, Ph.D., Chief, Special Populations Office, NIDA, Bethesda, MD

Presenters:  
Cassandra Chaney, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Louisiana State University, School of Human Ecology Family, Child and Consumer Sciences, Baton Rouge, LA
Obie Clayton, Ph.D., Professor, Morehouse College, Sociology Department, Atlanta, GA
Robert A. Mays Jr., Ph.D., Acting Director, Office of Rural Mental Health Research, Bethesda, MD
Linda Mellgren, Senior Social Services Analyst, ASPE/HHS, Washington, DC

Dr. Cassandra Chaney reviewed findings of studies concerning the characteristics of strong Black marriages; the definition and demonstration of love; romantic entry of Black adolescents; inter-racial dating among teens; pre-marital expectations; pre- and post-marital counseling; relationship dynamics of Black gay men and women; and relationship choices of Black single persons.

Dr. Obie Clayton reviewed research related to marriage as a wealth-building institution and the consequences of public policy and marriage for African Americans.

Ms. Linda Mellgren gave an overview of ASPE funded research about marriage and health. The funded research covered seven topical areas including gender and health, chronic conditions, intergenerational effects, health over one's life span, mental health and relationship quality, sexually transmitted infections and HIV, nutrition, and obesity. A research briefing is planned for fall 2009.

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) research activities were explained by Dr. Robert Mays. He defined mental health terms, reviewed the NIMH organization, and discussed many funding sources, particularly rural funding opportunities. Dr. Mays’ presentation also offered specific considerations for “a healthy marriage research agenda.”

To conclude the workshop, attendees generated a list of possibilities for future research.