Health Equity and Maternal Mental Health

The NYS Moving on Maternal Depression Project

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COVID-19 has let the virus of inequality run rampant

Black Americans have been killed by COVID-19 at three times the rate of white people. In the UK it’s four times.

Image: Reuters/Carlos Barria
Covid-19 is disproportionately taking black lives

Hundreds of years of racism has delivered poor health and economic outcomes for black people, making them more vulnerable in the pandemic.

By Patricia Erenes  |  Updated Apr 8, 2020  |  3:08am EDT
PUBLIC HEALTH

Why Racism, Not Race, Is a Risk Factor for Dying of COVID-19

Public health specialist and physician Camara Phyllis Jones talks about ways that jobs, communities and health care leave Black Americans more exposed and less protected

By Claudia Wallis on June 12, 2020
‘Long overdue’: lawmakers declare racism a public health emergency
Families Across the U.S. Struggle to Afford Diapers, Wipes and Formula

Over 56 million families have lost income since March 13, and diaper banks are straining to fill the need.
A New Covid-19 Crisis: Domestic Abuse Rises Worldwide

Movement restrictions aimed to stop the spread of the coronavirus may be making violence in homes more frequent, more severe and more dangerous.
"Staggering" need: COVID-19 has led to rising levels in food insecurity across the U.S.

By Grace Segers
October 14, 2020 / 10:36 AM / CBS News
During late June, 40% of U.S. adults reported struggling with mental health or substance use.

- Anxiety/Depression Symptoms: 31%
- Trauma/Stressor-Related Disorder Symptoms: 26%
- Started or Increased Substance Use: 13%
- Seriously Considered Suicide: 11%

*Based on a survey of U.S. adults aged ≥18 years during June 24-30, 2020
†In the 30 days prior to survey

For stress and coping strategies: bit.ly/dailylifecoping

CDC.GOV
bit.ly/MMWR81320
Some Pregnant Women in New York City Will Have to Deliver Babies Alone

“I have not stopped crying,” said an expectant mother who learned that her husband could not be with her when she gives birth.

By Christine Caron and Katie Van Syckle

March 24, 2020
COVID-19 Is Upending Parents’ Birth Plans

A global pandemic adds several more layers of logistical and emotional overwhelm to the already stress-filled time of new parenthood.

ASHLEY FETTERS  MARCH 19, 2020
COVID-19 Pandemic and Mental Health

- Changes in hospital visitor policies, which have impacted expectant families.
- Extended family and other supports have limited access to mom and baby after delivery, and hospital lengths of stay have been shortened for some mothers.
- New Black mothers go through childbirth with the fear of acquiring COVID, a particular concern for poor health outcomes, as well as now having minimal visitors to provide support.
Postpartum Depressive Symptoms* Among Mothers with a Recent Live Birth, by Race/Ethnicity, 2009-2010**

*Defined as a sum of 10 or higher in response to 3 questions of how often the mother reported feeling down, depressed, or sad; hopeless; or slowed down since the birth of the baby, where 1=never, 2=rarely, 3=sometimes, 4=often, 5=always. **Includes data from a total of 30 states and New York City; 25 states contributed both years. Mothers completed surveys between 2 and 9 months postpartum.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System, 2009-2010. Analysis conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Reproductive Health, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion.
Inequity in mental health services for Black women

- National studies have found that Black women are less likely to receive treatment and less likely to receive follow-up treatment even when initial treatment starts.
- The reasons Black women do not seek follow-up treatment are often deeply rooted in their experiences of structural racism, and the legacies of slavery that continue to reverberate in modern medical practice.
- As a result, some Black women distrust the medical system, or worry that talking about their feelings of depression to a professional could result in child welfare involvement in their families or being judged as a bad parent. In addition, cultural stigma around depression and mental health may discourage Black women from seeking out mental health services they need.
Why America's Black Mothers and Babies Are in a Life-or-Death Crisis

The answer to the disparity in death rates has everything to do with the lived experience of being a black woman in America.

By LINDA VILLAROSA. APRIL 11, 2018
Leading Causes of Maternal Mortality in the United States


* Amniotic fluid embolism is not included in the embolism grouping due to differences in etiology and opportunities for prevention.
† The underlying cause of death, as defined by the World Health Organization (WHO), is “disease or injury that initiated the train of events leading directly to death, or the circumstances of the accident or violence which produced the fatal injury.”
Risk factors cannot fully explain African Americans’ higher maternal and infant mortality rates

- Most research on health disparities in maternal and infant mortality focus on African American women’s greater exposure to risk factors around the time of pregnancy, including poverty and low socioeconomic status; limited access to prenatal care; and poor physical and mental health
- Does not fully account for the racial gap in outcomes; rather, these disparities stem from racial and gender discrimination over the life span
  - African American women who initiated prenatal care in the first trimester still had higher rates of infant mortality than non-Hispanic white women with late or no prenatal care
  - A recent study from the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene showed that African American women of normal weight were still at higher risk of dying in the perinatal period than non-African American obese women
Life Course Perspective

- Social and economic forces can profoundly affect African American women’s development across the life span.
- Chronic exposures to stress lead to higher allostatic load and burden on body systems.
- During pregnancy, chronically elevated levels of the stress hormone cortisol lead to immune suppression, increasing women’s risk of perinatal infections.
- Even if African American and non-Hispanic white women report similar levels of stress during their pregnancies, African American women’s increased exposure to stress throughout their lifetimes increases their allostatic load, which increases their risk of maternal and infant mortality.

Maternal Mortality
Infant Mortality

Maternal Morbidity
Preterm Birth, Low Birth Weight

Pre-existing Conditions (CVD, Asthma, hypertension, obesity)
Clinical treatment

Toxic Stress, Vigilance
Weathering, Medical System structure

Structural and Interpersonal
Racism, Unconscious Bias, Economic Stability
Behavioral Health Equity

- The right to access quality health care for all populations regardless of the individual’s race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, or geographical location. This includes access to prevention, treatment, and recovery services for mental and substance use disorders.
- Addresses social determinants, such as employment and housing stability, insurance status, proximity to services, culturally responsive care – all of which have an impact on behavioral health outcomes.

Samhsa: https://www.samhsa.gov/behavioral-health-equity
The coronavirus crisis has underscored the importance of community and social connection.

It is important to recognize that regulations, hospital policies, and public health practices — which are critical measures for infection control — may have a disproportionate psychological impact on the mental health of expecting mothers, especially Black women.
Sharelle’s Story
Broadening The Focus During Pregnancy To Total Women’s Health, Not Just Healthy Babies

Eugene Declercq

AUGUST 7, 2020
Maternal Depression as a Reproductive Justice Issue

- Access, not just choice to alternative birth options, prenatal, pregnancy and post-partum care
- Recognize and address the matrix of race, class, gender, and power and how these oppressions lead to negative birth experiences
- The work includes educating the community, challenging medicalization, centering the most vulnerable, and advocating across issues

Consider the ‘causes of the causes’: Racism, Social Justice and Equity
Thank you!
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