

## **The Disparities for Black Women in Healthcare**

**By Kaia Ramaley**

For most of us going to the hospital or to the doctor is not an anxiety-ridden event. The majority of us don't have to worry whether the doctor will treat us fairly, or whether we will leave with more health issues than we came in with. What goes unseen is that this is the reality for millions of black women.

Black women face disparities in healthcare that white women do not. According to Harvard Health, black women are 3-4 times more likely to die in childbirth than white women and almost 2 times as likely to experience infertility. Along with childbirth, research from the Endometriosis Foundation estimates that nearly a quarter of all black women ages 18-30 have uterine fibroids, compared with 7% of white women.

So why is this happening? The simple answer: discrimination. But it is more complex than that. As stated in the *New York Times*, the dangers black women face in pregnancy and childbirth are compounded by racism, unconscious biases in health care, and the long-term anxieties that come with being an African-American woman.

The day-to-day racism that black women face can take a toll on their health. Research by a professor of social epidemiology, has discovered that early-life exposure to Jim Crow Laws can cause negative health effects decades later. The idea of "weathering" explains that high levels of chronic stress can induce health issues and premature aging. Other more current forms of discrimination, such as predominantly black neighborhoods having higher levels of air pollution, fewer supermarkets than other neighborhoods, and lack of access to medical specialists, can further advance inequities in health issues for black women.

Not only does discrimination affect black women's health in their everyday lives, but also inside medical institutions. Even the wealthiest and most successful black women, such as

Serena Williams can't escape this occurrence. According to the New York Times, after giving birth Ms. Williams alerted the doctor that she suspected she was having a certain health complication that she was familiar with. The doctor wrongly responded by saying she was just confused. This is a common event for black women and leads to further stigmatization.

Lack of research and clinical trials regarding black women creates further issues. Health conditions that disproportionately impact black women, such as uterine fibroids, receive very little government research funding. Without proper research, common health issues for black women will never be resolved.

Although this all seems daunting there are certain steps we can take to combat these concerns. Things like mandating anti-racism training for healthcare professionals and dedicating more money for research regarding black women are small steps that will expedite a better future. No one deserves to fear the doctor's office, and it is our responsibility to make that a reality.

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