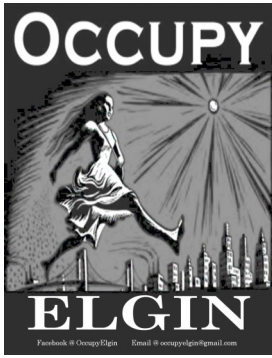


Black Women Matter!



One of systemic racism's most sinister effects is that it goes unnoticed. Despite being pervasive and visible to anyone who cares to look, few do. Black women face an unacknowledged crisis in America. But who hears their voices, or dares listen? Who validates their experience?

Black women carry a heavy burden of racial oppression in addition to sexist discrimination. By every known measure, from poverty, life expectancy, mental health, maternal and infant mortality to higher rates of breast cancer deaths, HIV infection, diabetes, hypertension, and obesity, Black women have it worse.

Ironically, the one measure in which Black women allegedly do better than their White counterparts is suicide. According to the National Center for Health Statistics (2017), Black women die by suicide at a rate of 2.8% per 100,000 compared to almost 8% for non-Hispanic White women. This statistic feeds the popular notion in American film and literature that Black women have enormous reserves of courage and resilience for dealing with adversity compared to other women, not to mention men, so why be worried?

Yet a recent study from Boston University's School of Medicine and Howard University (2023) challenges this reassuring stereotype. When gender is carefully separated out and suicide *attempts* are included, as well as self-inflicted wounds, the findings are that Black women ages 18 to 65 are at the highest suicide risk among women. Even more disturbing, Black women in the *highest* income strata had a 20% increase in their odds of suicide/self-inflicted injury compared to White women in the *lowest* income strata! Such data show the persistent and lingering effects of systemic racism even for wealthy Black women.

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Black mothers in hyper segregated sections of American cities like Chicago's Englewood and Garfield Park face conditions akin to warfare. Neighborhoods are plagued by violence, with people of all ages, but especially children, at risk of random or targeted shootings. Police protection is minimal or contributes to the violence. Good jobs and human resources are scarce or non-existent. Schools are underfunded. Health clinics and well-stocked, affordable food stores are few and distant. Politicians advocate hiring more cops to treat symptoms not causes. Meanwhile, disproportionately large numbers of Black fathers, husbands, and brothers who would otherwise assist these Black women languish in prisons and jails for non-violent crimes as a result of racially discriminatory sentencing practices.

"We live, we strive, we survive and we rise!" This is what Black women say in their churches and gatherings. It testifies to their courage and resistance. Yet they also report feeling "trapped"—fearful for themselves and their children, lonely, isolated, without resources, and desperately unhappy. Researchers and health-care workers both say these women report symptoms similar to people facing prolonged combat in war zones. Is anyone in Washington listening?

Make them listen. Bombard them with calls and emails. That's President Biden (202-456-1111.) Senator Durbin 202-224-2152, Senator Duckworth (202-224-6542,) and your own member of Congress. (202-224-3121). Check their websites for information about how to contact them by email. Tell them we need major legislation providing funding aimed at ending poverty and structural racism in America's big cities.

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