

Quantifying Care: A Statistical Snapshot of Black Women's Mental Health

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Key Takeaways

- Black women are at higher risk for depression, anxiety, and maternal mental health conditions, yet are less likely to seek or receive treatment compared to white women.
- Experiences of discrimination and negative interactions with healthcare providers are common and contribute to worse mental health outcomes and reduced engagement with the healthcare system.
- Stigma, cultural expectations, and systemic barriers remain significant obstacles to mental health care access for Black women.
- Black women experience more discrimination, are less likely to seek or receive adequate mental health care, and face unique barriers—including heightened stigma, mistrust, and fear of systemic repercussions—compared to other racial groups, particularly white women. These differences result in more severe, chronic, and under-treated mental health issues among Black women.

Prevalence of Mental Health Conditions

- Nearly **20%** of Black adults have experienced a mental health condition within the past year.
- Black women, specifically, are at least twice as likely to experience an episode of major depression as men.
- Almost **40%** of Black mothers and birthing people experience maternal mental health (MMH) conditions, which is twice the rate of white women.
- Over **50%** of postpartum depression cases in women of color go unreported.



Discussion Questions

- According to the data, 2 out of every 10 women in this room have experienced a mental health condition in the past year. How prepared do you feel to help yourself or someone you know effectively deal with a mental health diagnosis?
- Maternal mental health is rarely talked about, yet 4 in 10 women in this room has or will experience negative mental health as a result. What should we be doing as a sorority or community at large to decrease the negative effects of poor maternal health?



Treatment and Access Disparities

- Black women are only half as likely to seek help for depression compared to white women.
- Compared to white women, Black women are half as likely to receive treatment for maternal mental health conditions.
- Only **15.3%** of Black adults with a mental health condition received treatment within the past year.
- Among Black women, only **12%** seek help or treatment for symptoms of depression, despite 60% reporting symptoms.



Discussion Questions

- What are some of the ways that Black women can encourage one another to seek mental health care before it's too late? What do you consider too late?
- What initiatives should we entertain, as a sorority or community at large, to promote healthy discussions and access to mental health treatment?
- What are some of the reasons you believe Black women don't seek mental health treatment, despite recognizing that they need treatment? How can we remove these barriers?



Impact of Negative Healthcare Experiences

A healthcare worker in blue scrubs is holding a patient's hand. The worker's hands are positioned over the patient's hands, providing support. The patient's hands are clasped together. The background is a soft, out-of-focus blue, suggesting a clinical setting.

- **34%** of Black women who used healthcare in the past three years report that a negative experience with a provider resulted in worse health (13%), being less likely to seek care (19%), or switching providers (27%).
- **21%** of Black women are more likely than other groups to report being treated unfairly by a healthcare provider because of their race or ethnicity.
- **61%** of Black women say they prepare for possible insults or must be very careful about their appearance to be treated fairly during healthcare visits.

Discussion Questions

A close-up photograph of a healthcare worker in blue scrubs holding a patient's hand. The worker's hands are positioned over the patient's hands, providing support. The worker has a stethoscope around their neck. The patient's hands are clasped together, and they have white nail polish. The background is a soft, out-of-focus blue.

- With an understanding of the statistics surrounding negative experiences with health care providers, how can we use this information to promote better relationships with mental healthcare providers?
- How many of us have had a negative experience with a healthcare provider, including mental health? How did it make you feel? What strategies can we put in place to lessen the likelihood of negative encounters with our own healthcare providers?
- How can we shield ourselves from these negative experiences with healthcare providers?



Suicide and Severe Mental Health Outcomes

- In 2022, suicide was the **third leading cause of death** for Black or African Americans ages 10 to 24.
- **5.5%** of Black and African American adults have had serious thoughts of suicide within the past year, and 1.8% have made plans for suicide.



Discussion Questions

- Our youth are suffering with mental health at alarming rates, which in many cases are leading to suicide or persistent suicidal ideations. What role should we play as a sorority or community at large to tackle this very disheartening statistics?
- What solutions have you seen or heard that might play a role in reducing the prevalence of suicide among our collegiate sorors or young people in general?



Barriers and Stigma

- Black women face heightened risks of depression and anxiety, but stigma and cultural expectations often prevent them from seeking help.
- Barriers to treatment include mistrust of healthcare providers, cultural differences, stigma, lack of awareness, and economic strain.



Discussion Questions

- Why do you think that Black women face heightened risk of depression and anxiety?
- Do you think its getting better or worse with the heightened focus on mental health in recent years?
- Do you think stigma with seeking mental health treatment is still present? Why or why not?



Lower Utilization of Mental Health Services

- Black women, and Black adults in general, are less likely to seek and receive mental health care compared to white women. For example, only about **10.3%** of Black women seek mental health services, compared to **21.5%** of white women
- Other studies show that only **41%** of African American women reported seeking care for depression in the previous year, compared to **60%** of non-Hispanic white women
- When Black women do seek care, they are less likely to receive follow-up treatment, are prescribed fewer antidepressants, and are more likely to terminate therapy prematurely.

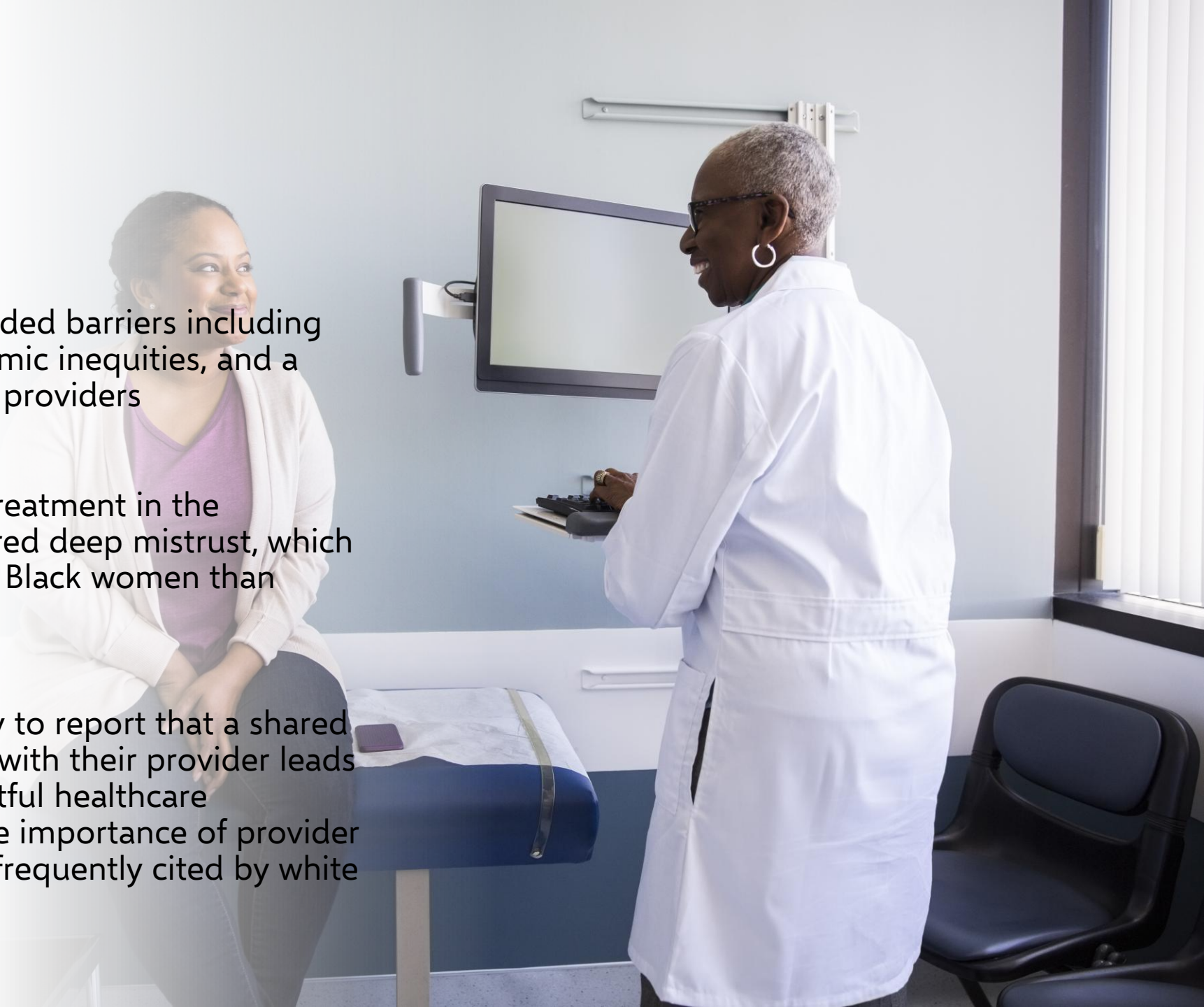


Discussion Questions

- Given the difference between White and Black women and mental health service utilization, what steps can we take as a sorority, or community at large to support one another in seeking, receiving, and sustaining mental health support?
- For those of us that have been treated for mental health conditions, and did not continue treatment, what were the driving factors for not continuing care? What other options would you consider outside of traditional mental health care?

Greater Barriers and Mistrust

- Black women face compounded barriers including racism, provider bias, economic inequities, and a lack of culturally competent providers
- Historical and ongoing mistreatment in the healthcare system has fostered deep mistrust, which is more pronounced among Black women than among many other groups
- Black women are more likely to report that a shared racial or ethnic background with their provider leads to more positive and respectful healthcare experiences, highlighting the importance of provider diversity—a need that is less frequently cited by white women



Discussion Questions

Pipeline stage	Black	White
New medical-school matriculants (2023-24 entering class)	10.0 %	51.2 %
All current MD-students (2023 enrollment)	10.4 %	53.1 %
Active physicians in practice (2023)	5.2 %	56.3 %

Source: Association of American Medical Colleges (November, 2023)

- According to the research, shared racial or ethnic background between patients and providers lead to more positive and respectful healthcare experiences, highlighting the importance of provider diversity.
- Yet, White medical school matriculants outnumber Black medical school matriculants by 5:1. At these rates, the reality of same race healthcare providers is bleak. What else could be implemented in our communities to lessen soften the negative impact of provider diversity in the medical arena?

Stigma and Cultural Pressures

The stigma around mental health is particularly acute in Black communities, with expectations for women to be "strong" and self-reliant.

This contributes to underreporting and reluctance to seek help, a dynamic less pronounced in some other racial groups.



Discussion Questions

- Do you think the "strong black woman" narrative is helping or hurting our mental health?
- In what ways can we as Black women change the superwomen narrative? Should we?



For more statistics and insights on mental health and healthcare in general, we invite you to visit the DREF website to download our latest report.

Click the link below:

Disparity to Equity – Delta Research and Educational Foundation

The image shows the cover of a report titled "FROM DISPARITY TO EQUITY: A Roadmap for Closing Black Healthcare Gaps". At the top, there are three logos: "DELTA RESEARCH AND EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION" with the tagline "CREATING POSSIBILITIES... IMPROVING LIVES", "Sister SCHOLARS ADVISORY COUNCIL HEALTH RESEARCH AND EDUCATIONAL PROMOTION", and "tribe INSIGHTS". The title is prominently displayed in the center. Below the title is a collage of three images: a smiling female doctor in a white coat, a road paved with stacks of money leading towards a city skyline, and a family of three (two women and a child) embracing. The bottom half of the image shows a blurred background of a person in a white lab coat sitting at a desk with a laptop and a stethoscope.

Ready to
take
action?

Download
the report
for more
statistics
and
resources.

Take Action!



1 For Healthcare Professionals

Healthcare providers play a critical role in reducing disparities in healthcare access and outcomes for Black Americans. Ensuring culturally competent and bias-free care is essential to improving both physical and mental health outcomes. Strategies include:

- **Enhance Cultural Competence:** Mandatory training on implicit bias, culturally responsive care, and the historical mistrust of the medical system among Black Americans.
- **Expand Mental Health Support:** Integrate mental health services into primary care settings to ensure early detection and treatment of mental health conditions.
- **Improve Patient-Provider Communication:** Encourage shared decision-making and actively involve Black patients in their treatment plans to foster trust and improve health outcomes.
- **Strengthen Preventative Care Efforts:** Promote early screenings, lifestyle interventions, and community-based wellness programs to reduce the prevalence of chronic conditions disproportionately affecting Black Americans.



2 For Policymakers

Addressing systemic barriers in healthcare requires comprehensive policy reforms that tackle economic, social, and structural inequities. Policymakers must prioritize:

- **Expand Healthcare Coverage:** Strengthening Medicaid, Medicare, and the Affordable Care Act to ensure equitable healthcare access for Black Americans across all age groups.
- **Invest in Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs):** Increase funding for FQHCs in underserved areas to improve access to primary and mental health care.
- **Advance Health Equity Legislation:** Develop policies that eliminate racial disparities in medical treatment, address social determinants of health (SDOH), and hold healthcare institutions accountable for equitable care delivery.
- **Support Black Healthcare Professionals:** Create scholarships, loan forgiveness programs, and incentives to increase the number of Black physicians, mental health providers, and allied health professionals.



3 For Communities

Communities play a vital role in advocating for and supporting better healthcare access and utilization. Community-based organizations, faith institutions, and advocacy groups must:

- **Promote Healthcare Literacy:** Provide educational programs on navigating the healthcare system, understanding insurance, and the importance of preventive care.
- **Build Mental Health Awareness:** Destigmatize mental health treatment in Black communities by promoting open conversations and increasing access to culturally relevant mental health resources.
- **Foster Partnerships with Healthcare Institutions:** Encourage collaboration between hospitals, local clinics, and community leaders to ensure that healthcare services are accessible, affordable, and culturally competent.
- **Support Policy Advocacy Efforts:** Mobilize around policies that advance racial health equity, increase funding for Black-serving health initiatives, and hold decision-makers accountable for improving health outcomes.



4 For Researchers

Research plays a fundamental role in identifying, understanding, and addressing healthcare disparities affecting Black Americans. Researchers must:

- **Expand Data Collection and Representation:** Ensure Black Americans are equitably represented in health studies to better understand racial disparities.
- **Investigate Root Causes of Health Inequities:** Conduct interdisciplinary studies on the historical, economic, and systemic factors driving health disparities.
- **Develop Evidence-Based Interventions:** Translate findings into actionable solutions that can inform policies, healthcare practices, and community programs.
- **Engage in Community-Based Research:** Partner with Black communities to co-develop research projects that address local health needs and build trust between researchers and underserved populations.