

Black Mental Health

Winter / Vol. 6 / 2023

TODAY

Hard Lessons From The Pandemic

Its ultimate impact on children
and educators of color is still
unfolding

Aftermath of Dismantling Roe vs. Wade

Advocates for Black woman
call for the creation of
allies and partnerships to
combat...

LEADING WHILE BLACK

Those hired
to spearhead
the change
often do so
at their own
professional
peril

Behind Invisible Bars

Families – especially children – of
the incarcerated suffer in silence
when loved ones are incarcerated



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CONTENT

14

WHO'S WHO IN BLACK MENTAL HEALTH

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Winter / Vol. 6 / 2023

Black Mental Health Today

Black Mental Health Today is a print and digital publication produced four times a year.

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6

BEFORE YOU ASK FOR A RAISE

Start by making an honest – and thorough – appraisal of your job performance and financial needs

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7

EXTRA CREDIT

Adjunct teaching positions provide opportunities for additional income and 'training the future of your profession'

16

'DYSLEXIA AND ME:

Founder of The Motherhood Group, Sandra Igwe shares her maternity experience and the hardships of others online and in print

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17

KNOWING WHEN TO CALL IT QUITS

Assess the pros, cons and motivations for sustaining a less-than-desirable relationship

Winter / Vol. 6 / 2023

Black Mental Health Today

22

AFTERMATH OF DISMANTLING ROE V. WADE

Advocates for Black women call for creation of allies and partnerships to combat 'disproportionate barriers to accessing abortion services'

Photo Courtesy of Adobe Stock

9

#NAVIGATINGSOCIALMEDIA

Making connections and finding support on social media platforms can be positive for Black Americans, but the danger of raising stress and anxiety is just a click away

12

LEADING WHILE BLACK

Attention to DEI in the workplace has never been higher. Those hired to spearhead the change often do so at their own professional peril

19

BEHIND INVISIBLE BARS

Families – especially children – of the incarcerated suffer in silence when loved ones are incarcerated

24

HARD LESSONS FROM THE PANDEMIC

Ensuring a quality education for Black students was a challenge before COVID-19. Its ultimate impact on children and educators of color is still unfolding

Letter From the Publisher



LaTonya Summers,
Ph.D.

Every year, I wait quietly and listen for the word that will shape my year. One year, my word was vulnerability and I practiced opening myself up to others and challenges so I could gain depth. Last year, the word was promotion and while I thought I would be promoted at work with a title and a raise, I was promoted in richer and more fulfilling ways without being overworked and underpaid. This year, the word discipline came to the surface.

I wasn't surprised when I recognized that it would be the word I would focus on. I looked it up in the dictionary to ensure I understood my assignment, and the definition "self-control" felt like a sucker punch in the stomach. I wondered how I had drifted away from the regimented person I used to be. A few things came to mind: being an empty-nester (no kids, no schedule), working in academia (no clock-punching nowhere), moving to Florida (nobody's in a hurry here), and the pandemic (well, you understand that one). Like anything else, I wasn't undisciplined in just one area of life, it showed up almost everywhere—time, appetite, finances, physical activity, and so on.

I've got a feeling that 2023 is going to bring some challenges and opportunities that will require me to have discipline, stamina, and competitive prowess. To prepare myself, I joined a free 6-week kickboxing and nutrition challenge. Well, it's free if I meet the goal of losing 6% of body fat. If not, I lose \$500. I have a few things in my favor: I'm a Leo, I hate losing, and I love free. I plan to kick butt In 2023!

What's your word for the year and how are you preparing yourself to develop or obtain it? Let me know at connect@

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or on Twitter @BlackMHToday
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Cheers to the best year we
have ever had!

ARCHIVE PUBLICATIONS



SPRING 2022



WINTER 2021



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Earning more money might increase the potential for more meaningful connections, less stress and the ability to bestow generational wealth.

Mind & Money / **BEFORE YOU ASK FOR A RAISE**

- Start by making an honest – and thorough – appraisal of your job performance and financial needs

Article by **Chasity Chandler**
Photo courtesy of **pexels.com**

On the one hand, Scripture says: “Money is the root of all evil.” On the other, Scripture states that “Money answereth all things,” which is commonly interpreted as “Money makes the world go around.” We may never know which one of these statements rings true for most people, but one thing is certain: Money is necessary to live.

We pursue degrees and careers we think will allow us to provide for ourselves and our families. Some people make the correct choice. Others select careers or jobs that don’t generate enough income to cover basic expenses and necessities. This leads some of us to “rob Peter to pay Paul,” or live paycheck to paycheck.

In today’s economy, especially with inflation, many in the Black community have multiple jobs. Working multiple shifts or jobs leaves many Black children to take care of themselves at home while their parents work. This also greatly impacts the family unit and relationships within it. Earning more money might increase the potential for more meaningful connections, less stress and the ability

to see generational wealth as not just a dream but a reality.

One of the most basic steps to wealth is earning what you deserve. If you aren’t working for yourself, you don’t have the power to unilaterally “raise your rates.” So that means you have to ask your employer for a raise, which can be an intimidating process. Following are a few things to consider when asking for a raise, as well as some steps that can be taken.

How has your performance been on the job?

Good attendance and job performance, great quarterly or annual reviews will definitely help support your case for a raise.

Are you open to promotion?

If you’re able to express interest in furthering your career with the company, your employer may view you as an asset that could pay off for years to come.

Know how much you need

Do not go into the conversation blindly. Know how much or the percentage you need to help your financial situation. Calculate your actual expenses (rent/mortgage, utilities, groceries, car payment and insurance, child care if applicable, money for savings, self-care, an emergency fund and at least a cushion so that you aren’t living paycheck to paycheck. Take your hourly wage and multiply it by the number of hours worked per week then multiply that by 52. This will give you your yearly salary or gross income. Doing this with your desired rate and subtracting it from your initial total calculation of expenses let’s you know if you’re making enough or not.

Regardless of the outcome, I encourage you to ask for the compensation you deserve and need to take care of yourself and your family.

Chasity Chandler is CEO and owner of the Center for Sexual Health and Wellness in Florida, New Jersey and Massachusetts. She is a relationship and sex therapist with more than 20 years of experience in the helping field.

Clinical Entrepreneurship / **EXTRA CREDIT**

— Adjunct teaching positions provide opportunities for additional income and ‘training the future of your profession’

Article by **Dwayne Buckingham**
Photo courtesy of Unsplash.com

Mental health professionals share their knowledge and display their skill set in health care agencies, nonprofit organizations and even in Fortune 500 corporations. While these settings are excellent places to demonstrate your skills and make money, teaching college courses as an adjunct instructor can also prove to be lucrative.

To expand my money-making potential, I ventured into teaching and landed an adjunct position at George Mason University teaching second-year master's level social workers. My experience was great, which is why I encourage you to consider a teaching position at a community college or four-year university.

If you are like me, you probably have a few questions, such as how do I get started as an adjunct professor, what is the application process and what are the professional and financial benefits? For answers, I interviewed [Indira Harris](#), Ph.D., a licensed clinical social worker and chief of the behavioral health unit for the Immigration Health Services Corps within the Department of Homeland Security.

Following are Harris' edited responses to my questions.

How does one start as an adjunct professor?

“It's best to start small and work your way to larger academic settings once you gain teaching experience,” says Harris. “I started at a relatively small university in Ohio with an even smaller satellite



mini-campus in South Florida, where I lived while teaching in their bachelor of social work program. They had a distance learning program, which was an excellent start for someone without teaching experience.

“After this role, I transitioned to an HBCU, where I served as an adjunct professor in social work in their BSW program. I also taught introductory courses in their MSW program. After this experience, I was ready for prime

time! I secured adjunct positions at three major universities across the country, and with larger academic institutions come bigger paydays.”

What is the process, from applying to getting hired?

“For the larger universities, I applied online first. The online applications required my CV, a document describing my course teaching preferences and teaching style, three references,

Continued on page 8

a cover letter and a one-page document detailing my teaching philosophy.

“(Know that) it can take a few months and up to a year to be contacted by the hiring authorities for an interview. Many universities have different philosophies and preferences so be careful who you apply to and if you support the overall stance of the academic institution. For example, you wouldn’t apply to a conservative Christian university if you’re a practicing Buddhist or Hindu because they expect you to incorporate Christian thought and sensibilities into your teaching.”

What are the professional and financial benefits?

“Professionally, you remain at the forefront of the direction the field

is going in because you know the curriculum the students are using and some of the things they’re doing in the field. You also stay current on issues the profession faces. One of the most impactful aspects of being an adjunct is you have a hand in training the future of your profession and helping instill the profession’s values, and stoke (students’) passion about the field.

“Regarding your money-making potential, depending on the university or college, you can make on the bachelor’s level \$250 per student or a certain amount per credit hour. On the master’s level, you can earn upwards of \$2,800 to \$6,500 per semester/per class depending on the length of the semester (i.e., eight to 14 weeks). “On the doctorate level, you can make as much as \$7,000 to \$8,000 per semester/per class, depending

on the school. It is definitely a way to enhance your professional development, stay current in your profession, impact adult students lives and simultaneously make great money.”

Serving as an adjunct professor is a great option for mental health professionals who want to make extra money and educate students on how to move forward in their careers.

Dwayne Buckingham, Ph.D., is a clinical psychotherapist, decorated veteran and business owner, ICF certified coach, consultant and CEO of Buckingham Consulting Group. You can reach him at @DrDwayneBuckingham on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, and drbuckingham.com or buckinghamcgroup.com.



FEATURE / #NAVIGATINGSOCIALMEDIA

— Making connections and finding support on social media platforms can be positive for Black Americans, but the danger of raising stress and anxiety is just a click away

Article by **Vanessa Infanzon**
Photos courtesy of Adobe Stock

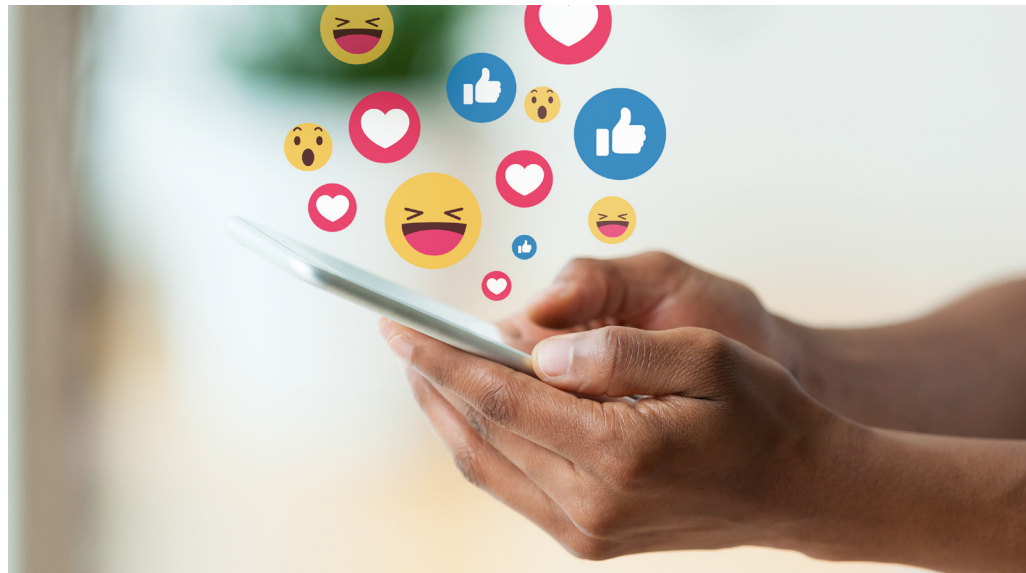
Diane Francis was an [undergraduate college student](#) at the University of the Virgin Islands in the early 2000s when social media was gaining prominence. She was introduced to what people were doing on the world wide web by professors who were studying the internet.

“I’ve always been interested in media and communication,” Francis says. “I love media for the fact that it introduces us to so many people’s lives and experiences, but I’ve (also) been attracted to the educational component of media.”

Fifteen years later, Francis is the associate professor in the communications department at the University of Kentucky in Lexington. A health communication researcher with a focus on communication and health disparities, Francis studies mental health and social media among Black populations.

During the pandemic, she recognized how forming connections to family and friends from all over the world was important. She noticed people interacting in various ways, such as attending virtual religious services and sharing images of food to gain deeper relationships with individuals they couldn’t see in real life.

In a recent paper, [“Twitter Is Really Therapeutic at Times: Examination of Black Men’s Twitter Conversations Following Hip-Hop Artist Kid Cudi’s Depression Disclosure,”](#) Francis expounds on a critical discovery: When Black male celebrities share their personal stories about



depression, medication and mental health, it opens a space for conversations among Black men, which she characterized as network support.

In her discussion, Francis asserts, “Outreach to Black men regarding mental health has its challenges, but as shown in this paper, social media can be a powerful tool for understanding beliefs and practices among hard-to-reach populations.”

Even with the positive discussions and networking gained through social media participation, the anxiety and stress associated with reading posts and being exposed to negative comments and news, Francis suggests regulating the amount of time spent on social media and having a clean understanding of what you’re accessing. “I consider social media to be a bonus as well as a bane for mental well-being and mental wellness,” Francis says.

Social media literacy

[Kepios](#), a company that studies digital

trends, revealed in an [October 2022 report](#) that more than 59% of the world’s population uses social media over 17 platforms. This number is most likely low because it doesn’t account for children under the age of 13.

In the United States, according to a [2021 study by Pew Research Center](#), 72% of adults interact with at least one platform. Broken down by race, 80% of Hispanic people, 77% of Black people and 69% of white people report using at least one social media site.

Francis recommends individuals increase social media literacy by checking the validity and reputation of a site when reading posts and watching clips on social media platforms. She wonders what viewers do when they encounter information on a platform such as TikTok that increases their anxiety: “Are you able to filter through these things and find things that improve your well-being? Are you able to understand and interpret what you find online?”

Francis is currently studying levels

Continued on page 10

of anxiety in young Black women who are social media users. “I can’t make the claim that it was their social media use that increased their anxiety or if there were already high levels of anxiety before and social media exacerbated that,” Francis says. “But there seems to be a correlation between the use and anxiety during that time. This might be a time when mental health professionals can come in and help young Black women.”

Vicarious trauma

In the past seven years, violent acts against Black individuals have been recorded and posted on social media, says Ashley Gilmore, licensed clinical mental health counselor and founder of Gilmore Counseling and Consulting Services in Durham, North Carolina. The vicarious trauma, the suffering felt by what’s happened to someone else, piqued Gilmore’s interest.

“I started doing research around what vicarious trauma looked like for us related to seeing these images on the web consistently,” Gilmore says. “And the one thing about social media is, in certain places, they still live there. You can go back. It’s the vicarious trauma from watching these images over and

over.”

After George Floyd’s murder was replayed across the internet, Gilmore noticed how social media became a place for Black people to connect. “Everyone was posting images of being outside and protesting,” she says. “It became almost intoxicating.”

The influx of images promoted Gilmore to research further. She made the connection between the images and videos posted on social media to the practice of mailing postcards, with photographs of Black people who had been lynched, across the country to white families. “Black bodies have essentially been victimized publicly for years,” she says. “Even now it continues.”

In her practice, Gilmore asks clients what’s important about watching these videos and images, what emotions are triggered, what they are getting out of the experience and how they can change it.

“Turn the phone off and then journal,” she explains. “Journaling is a really good tool to ask: What is

this doing for your self-esteem? What are you learning?”

Building boundaries

Establishing boundaries around social media use can help clients find a healthy balance. Gilmore suggests logging off for the day or setting time limits on the phone, like turning it off before heading to bed. “(And when you are logged in) know ... not to compare yourself to other pages or people,” she says. “Recognize who you are and learn from the (posts). Be careful who you follow. And it’s OK to unfollow or block.”

Some of Gilmore’s clients follow her on social media, where she posts affirmations and selfcare information. “We can set the example for how we want our clients to show up on social media,” Gilmore says. “What we post makes a difference. I think it’s OK for our clients to follow us on our business pages or to interact with us in a professional setting, if they feel comfortable. I think it’s important that we set the example for how we engage social media, when we show up on social media professionally and we can model that for our clients.”

Vanessa Infanzon is a freelance writer in Charlotte, North Carolina, whose wide-ranging work has been published by regional and national media outlets.





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FEATURE / LEADING WHILE BLACK

In 2020, when the Black Lives Matter movement was gaining greater traction and George Floyd was murdered by Minneapolis police, social justice and equity issues began to dominate the collective conversation. The movement also triggered the creation of a surge of diversity, equity and inclusion programs and positions in the nonprofit, philanthropic and corporate arenas.

Yet a few years later, not much has changed. DEI is big business, with companies and higher education spending more than \$8 billion on training and staffing. Although the commitment to diversity in corporate America appears to be strong, the actual end game – diversity, equity and inclusion – is not.

In my role as a consultant to foundations and nonprofits on diversity, equity and inclusion, I always ask tough questions around the intention for these initiatives. Many times, organizations are more invested in hiring a person of color or inviting a high-profile Black individual to take a seat on a board to check off a box than they are in making systematic change around racial equity and inclusion. It often feels like the “low hanging fruit” strategy, in that once they hire a person, add a person to the board or do a few trainings, they feel that they have done their due diligence.

Organizations’ intentions can be significantly different from those of the Black professionals they recruit to take on DEI. Those who are approached and recruited are often experienced professionals in their fields, who are passionate about wanting to help shape enduring and systematic change.

Once the DEI officer starts to move through what the policy changes and shifts might be – usually with the presentation of a strategic plan, it is the start of a very bumpy road that time and again has put the person and their position at risk. One former DEI officer told me, “It was like being promised that you have a seat at the leadership table where decisions are made, only to find out that you have

— Attention to DEI in the workplace has never been higher. Those hired to spearhead the change often do so at their own professional peril

by **Andrea King Collier**

Photo courtesy of **Adobe Stock**

Photo courtesy of **Linda Goler Blount**



been invited to sit at the kiddie table quietly.”

One of the big stories on the DEI front in 2022 was about Dr. Chris Pernell, who was Newark, New Jersey University Hospital’s DEI officer. Pernell says her efforts to eliminate bias in the organization were undermined almost immediately after she started the job. Pernell, who

was often on the media circuit talking about COVID-19 and its impact on communities of color, was sanctioned and investigated for her statements.

Pernell also brought her personal experiences into the discussion when she disclosed that her father had died because of COVID-19, ABC News reported that Pernell

was told to her hospital executives disapproved of her “mouthing off” on television.

“It was as if I, a Black woman who had experienced loss and hurt and grief in this pandemic, should not speak about it,” she said in the ABC interview

In September 2022, the leadership announced her departure to “pursue new opportunities.”

Stress of being a torch bearer

But her experience hasn't slowed Black professionals from taking on these roles. According to LinkedIn data, the number of people who hold a title around DEI has grown each year since 2020. For many Black professionals, these positions are more than just a job. They understand a lot rides on their ability to open the doors to opportunities and to create equity. A recent McKinsey report on racial equity concluded: “The Black/white labor-force disparity persists despite a decade-long economic expansion – and the pandemic has reversed recent progress in narrowing the gap.”

Linda Goler Blount, president and CEO of the Black Women's Health Imperative, a nonprofit created to protect and advance the health and well-being of Black women and girls, says it is important for prospective employees and board members to ask key questions before taking on these positions.

“If are looking at this as an opportunity to make change, you need to make sure that you are on the same page as the organization that is recruiting you.” Blount says there is often a disconnect between what the organization wants and what the person being recruited thinks should be happening.

She also addresses to the importance of “having a network of people to talk to before and after you accept the position. Blount, who has turned down overtures several times, says, “It doesn't take

long for Black leaders to come into these in organizations to see some of the internal barriers and biases along the way.” She also talks about organizations hiring Black female executives to “fix their race problem, but discard them once the problem is addressed even in the most superficial ways.”

‘Robust sense of self’ is required

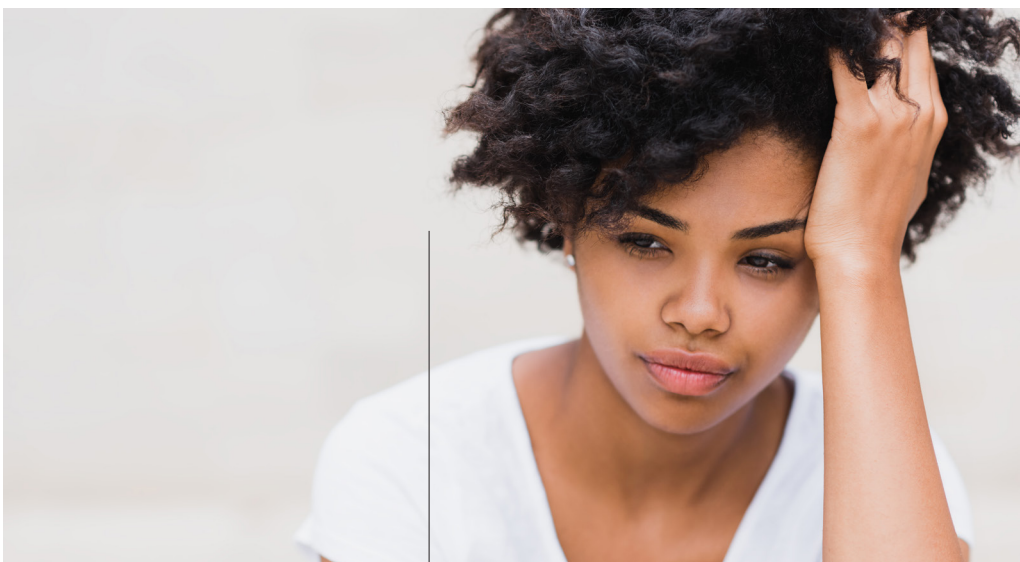
Over the years, I have been hired to conduct focus groups consisting of Black women who had taken on the responsibilities of DEI in predominantly white institutions. To a person, each one talked about the stress and anxiety they felt while tackling the big and small issues of racial equity in their workplaces. They all spoke about feeling sad, and overwhelmed by the exhaustion and frustration around talking about equity, without seeing any change, and being racially triggered and targeted.

A seminal work on the journey of Black professionals in DEI work, “Race Work and Leadership: New Perspectives on the Black Experience,” is a compilation of voices of Black leaders who have taken on this work. One of the studies in the book, “African American Women as Change Agents in the White Academy” by Muriel E. Shockley and Elizabeth L.

Holloway, discusses the experiences of Black women navigating racism and sexism in academia, and more specifically, factors that helped them thrive. The study suggests that in order to come out of this work whole and with their mental health intact, Black professionals need to have a “robust sense of self” in order to thrive and survive.

I have seen people get fooled into thinking their management team and their co-workers want them to succeed in creating equitable and diverse spaces and policies. It can be isolating and offer a false sense of confidence and security. If you aren't firmly rooted in who you are and what values you bring to your job, these situations can chip away at your well-being and mental health. Or as Blount says, “Know who you are going in, and stay true to that person even as you face the challenges.”

Andrea King Collier is a journalist who also consults with nonprofits, foundations and corporations on strategies around diversity, equity and inclusion in the workplace and in the communities they serve.





WHO'S WHO IN BLACK MENTAL HEALTH

Notable professionals across the country employ their expertise and experience to help others

By Rudri Patel



TIFFANY JENKINS

When licensed professional counselor [Tiffany Jenkins](#) isn't working with patients at her practice, [Awakening Change Counseling Services](#) in New Jersey, she is powerlifting, which she calls "the greatest stress relief ever." She understands the importance of finding positive ways to deal with stress since she is "living with general anxiety disorder."

Jenkins wants to create spaces for others to change. "I like just the push of watching someone go from, 'I don't know if I can do it' to — 'Oh, my God, I did it,'" she says.

She also understands the stigma of being Black and admitting to mental health struggles. "Black folks have been very faith based and so part of the stigma that I've seen with folks who seek therapy is it is pitched as an anti-spiritual practice," she says. Jenkins believes therapists should partner with faith-based organizations and have conversations around the intersection between mental wellness versus mental illness.



JENNIFER SHEPARD PAYNE

[Jennifer Shepard Payne's](#) disdain for biology at UCLA took her down an unexpected path — to psychology. During the summer, she worked with underprivileged children. "It was such a life-changing experience. .. I just know I had the heart for underrepresented populations," she says.

She dove into social work and pursued her doctorate in social welfare. In her role as a research scientist and clinician at the [Kennedy Krieger Institute](#) in Maryland, she's learned the obstacles causing Black people to delay mental health treatment. "There are insurance and transportation problems, and cultural differences in the way we treat mental health and what it means," she says.

Payne wants to help others manage their symptoms. Her perspective comes from her own experience with fibromyalgia. "I really want to live with purpose. That means acceptance and commitment therapy which teaches us to commit to action toward those values. Success is defined by moving toward those values."



KEVIN COKLEY

For psychologist and University of Michigan professor [Kevin Cokley](#), the biggest misconception is that Black people are not interested in discussing mental health.

The dialogue around mental health is occurring more frequently and probably coincides with "the rise and usage of social media," says Cokley. "Black men have been socialized not to express emotions, but with an outpouring of grief like when Kobe Bryant died, it helps to normalize sadness and loss."

Black mental health needs to be considered in a larger context. "There must be an understanding that there are lived experiences, a historical context that needs to be considered when examining the mental health of Black folks," he says.

Cokley is spearheading a book project about another psychological issue — the impostor phenomenon. He is "applying this idea to the experiences of Black people and other minorities who struggle in predominantly white spaces because they don't feel like they belong there."



PAUL BASHEA WILLIAMS

When he was child, being told to pray bad things away wasn't a strategy that worked for licensed clinical social worker [Paul Bashea Williams](#). Instead, he entered the mental health field because it required him to be honest.

His love of counseling became cemented when he attended East Tennessee State University. "Once I got to college, I came home one summer and worked for my mentor, a social worker. I started as an administrative worker and by the end of it I became a counselor. I knew immediately this is what I wanted to do."

An interest that was birthed in adolescence led Williams in 2017 to begin his private counseling practice, [Hearts in Mind Counseling](#), in Maryland. "I want to create an environment where my help is a consistent facilitator of feeling and understanding. There is an opportunity for vulnerability in this space," he says.

Book Review/

'DYSLEXIA AND ME: HOW TO SURVIVE AND THRIVE IF YOU'RE NEURODIVERGENT'

Article by **LaTacia Ruff**

Photo by

“Dyslexia and Me: How to Survive and Thrive If You're Neurodivergent” was written by Onyinye Udokporo, a resident of London whose family is of Nigerian descent.

Udokporo wears many hats. She is an entrepreneur (having started a tutoring service at age 12 that she has grown into an online academic assistance program), speaker and writer. In this book, Udokporo shares her personal story about navigating life with dyslexia. These experiences include heartaches and amazing successes as well as some tips and strategies that assisted her or could have if known earlier.

“Dyslexia and Me” is an easy read even with such differences as the British use of “tuition,” which requires one to use context clues or search a dictionary to understand the meaning is “teaching” and not the cost associated with learning. While there are no other issues regarding writing style or the conversational tone, Udokporo tended to put certain words in boldface throughout the book in a way that a reader eventually accepts as an attempt for emphasis. This is only notable because it could be viewed as an editing error.

Scholarly readers will appreciate the references identified after each chapter. Parents and caretakers will learn ways to provide support to their dependents with similar diagnoses, or understand more about being impacted by dyslexia. Parents will no doubt be happy to read passages (statements) debunking the belief that dyslexia is genetically transferred

from mother to child because of an associated gene located on the X chromosome.

Youths and adults diagnosed with a learning disorder will find a spectrum of practical steps to take, such as taking guided tours before the start of the new academic year as a method to preserve needed muscle memory.

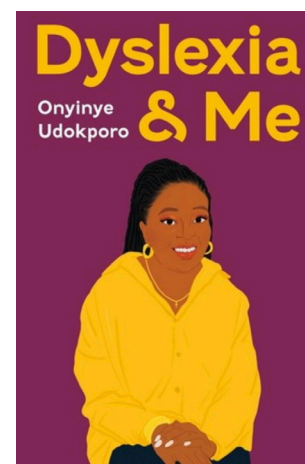
Memorization is a skill Udokporo believes most neurodivergent individuals use to help them hide or overcompensate for the signs associated with their specific condition.

For clinicians seeking a book to educate new or existing clients, “Dyslexia and Me” will be a resource for Black individuals hoping their diagnosed condition is not debilitating. For years, Udokporo could only find examples of white males who thrived despite being diagnosed as dyslexic. This book provides a relevant, positive reference for Black clients.

Each clinician will need to consider their clients from a holistic perspective when offering this book as a resource because one of the underlying themes is the well-known and often overlooked issue relating to systemic racism and its impact on educational spaces. Racism and inequality that seems inescapable can be triggering for some. While it is important to be aware of, it may not be necessary for a book that purports to instruct readers on how to survive and thrive as a neurodivergent.

If nothing else, readers will be impressed with the author and her journey from a little girl trying to best her brother in family spelling bees to a highly educated and award-winning proponent of neurodiversity.

LaTacia Ruff, Ph.D., considers herself a Chicago girl despite residing in North Carolina where she works as a licensed counselor. She's on a mission to normalize mental health and debunk myths associated with mental health through her program Candid Conversations. Learn more at www.choose-ccc.com.



LOVE & RELATIONSHIPS/

KNOWING WHEN TO CALL IT QUILTS

- Assess the pros, cons and motivations for sustaining a less-than-desirable relationship

Article by **Chasity Chandler**
Photo courtesy of Pexels.com

Relationships are some of the most complex, important and nuanced things we go through as people. What draws us in to connect with a person or people in an intimate and romantic way differs from situation to situation.

Relationships are a lot of work and can be beautiful if couples realize this work is ongoing and won't remain in the carefree "honeymoon" phase. Those who are determined to make the honeymoon last – due to family traditions, religion, societal pressure and the desire to succeed – might stay in relationships that may no longer suit them and/or are unhealthy.

Some of the most common reasons people remain in relationships too long are due to finances; children; or believing they are comfortable with the conflict and chaos, religious beliefs and fear of starting over or being alone.

"Until death due us part" are the words among the vows most think about when divorce or breaking up. They might also wonder how others will view them and will the breakup impact my family and friends. It's as though there is more concern with the perception of others than the actual toxicity, misery and overall unhappiness that exists within the couple.



Couples should consider contacting a professional for assistance when facing a breakup.

I spoke with LaTania Williams McAdoo, a couples therapist with [Hopeful Expectations Counseling & Consulting Group](#) in Charlotte, North Carolina, about what she thinks are vital aspects for couples she's working with to consider when deciding whether to end their relationships.

- You've seriously committed to a minimum of six months to one year of therapy and applied what you've learned to your marriage or committed relationship.
- You've learned to effectively communicate, manage conflict, understand each other's perspectives and have given it 110%.
- You no longer feel safe emotionally, physically, mentally or spiritually.
- You've reached conclusions on your own without any outside influences.
- One or both partners have had multiple affairs, which have caused you to experience trauma,

and you spend most of your time ruminating over the betrayal, feeling anxious and unsettled, and lacking peace.

- Your loss of peace is affecting your health and well-being.

People will have many opinions about what they think you and your partner(s) should do when it comes to remaining in or ending a relationship. I believe it's important to make this decision based on what you need and how staying will impact your overall well-being.

Yes, leaving will impact your friends, family and others around you, but it doesn't mean the departure must be a negative action. It will be different, scary and hard as hell; however, the alternative can be more detrimental. Knowing when to call it quits is vital, so don't hesitate to contact a professional to assist you and your partner in this decision. Many aspects of your life depend on it.

Chasity Chandler is CEO and owner of the Center for Sexual Health and Wellness in Florida, New Jersey and Massachusetts. She is a relationship and sex therapist with more than 20 years of experience in the helping field.



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FEATURE / BEHIND INVISIBLE BARS

— Families – especially children – of the incarcerated suffer in silence when loved ones are incarcerated

Article by **Shirley Moore**
Photo courtesy of
Ebony Underwood
Ye Jinghan / Unsplash
Milicia Tedder

In 2021, The Sentencing Project, a Washington, D.C.-based research and advocacy group, released a report titled “The Color of Justice: Racial and Ethnic Disparity in State Prisons.”

Among its findings:

- Black Americans are incarcerated in state prisons at nearly five times the rate of white Americans.
- In 12 states, more than half the prison population is Black: Alabama, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, Mississippi, New Jersey, North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia.

While these are certainly dark figures, the depressing statistics only scratch the surface. Behind the numbers lie the stories of incarceration's effects on the families left to cope.

When a loved one is jailed or imprisoned, partners and children can feel isolated, abandoned, angry and bitter, plus a kaleidoscope of other emotions, according to Milicia Tedder, assistant professor of psychology at North Carolina Central University in Durham.

“(For children), it’s reminiscent of an environment where people don’t care. It feels unsafe. They feel neglected. It affects (their) mood, (their) physical health,” she said in a recent interview with Black Mental Health Today.

What’s more, help and treatment options for the incarcerated and their loved ones are limited, at best.

Mental health professionals say more support and counseling options are needed and should be offered to prisoners and their families.

“We’ve seen some wins (such as allowing prisoners to have therapeutic video calls with families), but there’s more to do,” says Tedder, who specializes in trauma and PTSD.

Ebony Underwood, whose father was incarcerated for more than 30 years, founded and runs a national nonprofit advocacy organization called We Got Us Now, which

amplifies issues affecting children and young adults with incarcerated parents.

“I would like to see programs across all 50 states that actively engage in and support the well-being of children and young adults with incarcerated parents and their families,” she says.

How did we get here?

The need for more support is not new. Mental health professionals have studied mass incarceration and its impact on Black people for years.

While painting a bleak picture of the correctional system’s present and future states in its report, The Sentencing Project also traced some of the ugly and disturbing history to institutional racism.

“It is clear that the outcome of mass incarceration today has not occurred by happenstance but has been designed through policies created by a dominant white culture that insists on suppression of others,” the report said.

The Sentencing Project advocates for effective and humane responses to crime that minimize imprisonment and criminalization of youth

and adults.

“Going to prison is a major life-altering event that creates obstacles to building stable lives in the community, such as gaining employment and finding stable and safe housing after release,” the group notes in its 2021 report. Imprisonment also reduces lifetime earnings and negatively affects life outcomes among children of incarcerated parents.”

While the organization only touches on the residual effects of incarceration on families, mental health professionals have amassed a wealth of information to prove the negative effects.

When family connections are lost

Marcus Shaw, an assistant professor of criminology at California State University, Fresno, has studied the effects of parental incarceration extensively and had two research studies on parental incarceration published in top academic journals, according to an article on Fresno State’s website.

Interviewing 31 children (now

Continued on page 20



Within child-centered play therapy, says Ami Camp, developing a rapport with the child and family is crucial. Photo by Kristen L. Martin

adults) of incarcerated parents over the span of three years, he found that children suffer from financial and emotional strain, residential instability and the “transference of stigma,” the idea that the child is judged for the parent’s incarceration. Shaw also found that some children of incarcerated parents were even denied employment because of the parent’s criminal record.

Transference stigma isn’t the only problem children face, Tedder says. Missing a parent at home could lead to children misbehaving at school, anxiety, depression, isolation and fear. Many children even face the possibility of foster care.

Profound grief others don’t understand

“Then, there’s grief, which is not often discussed,” Tedder says. “(Children) may feel like they’re by themselves – not knowing how to make sense of everything.”

She adds: “Imagine, you’re there with your primary caretaker, and all of the

sudden they’re incarcerated. “It disrupts your routine. This person who took care of you, fed you, is no longer there.” Children may wonder if their caregiver will leave, too, and they may blame themselves for the adults’ departure, Tedder explains.

The grief that hits children feels, to them, almost like the incarcerated parent has died, she says. But society does not perceive incarceration as a form of death. Public judgment of the incarcerated can be harsh. To a child, it may seem no one cares about the parent they’re missing.

More needs to be done

Children often need therapy. Unfortunately, for distressed families, there’s very little support. Tedder encourages parents to seek out community groups for support for themselves and their children.

“Even if there’s no child involved, I think it’s still important to seek support because there’s a change in the family dynamic,” Tedder says.

“It’s still a loss.”

Adds Underwood: “Millions of families across the U.S. have been devastated by the impacts of incarceration. Finding a support group, getting a therapist and journaling are some great ways to personally begin to do self-care ...”

We Got Us Now’s flagship Actionist Leadership Program trains, develops and equips children with the tools for advocacy, civic engagement and professional development. Participants share tools, tips and best practices with others to help eliminate the trauma, stigma and shame of parental incarceration.

The harm of cutting families off

The penal system is doing what it feels it can do, she adds. But true change requires more reform in public policy, prosecution and sentencing, as well as changes within the for-profit (private) prison system. Tedder also believes the system could do more to help

families on the edge.

If a prisoner commits an infraction, the first thing officials often do is prohibit contact with the family. Tedder says that’s not the answer – and it needs to stop. It’s a punitive measure that doesn’t benefit the incarcerated person or their loved ones.

“The things that will help everyone cope, all those things are taken away,” she says, adding the family connection is the glue that holds everything together, giving prisoners and their loved ones hope for tomorrow.

Shirley Moore is a freelance writer and former newspaper reporter who now works in public relations in Charlotte, North Carolina.



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COVER / AFTERMATH OF DISMANTLING ROE V. WADE

— Advocates for Black women call for creation of allies and partnerships to combat ‘disproportionate barriers to accessing abortion services’

Article by
Nedra Rhone

Photo by **Rory Doyle Photography**

Photos courtesy of:
Janette Robinson-Flint
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“I can’t let women and girls down,” says Michelle Colon, founder of Mississippi-based nonprofit Sisters Helping Every Woman Rise and Organize.

In June 2022, before the Supreme Court overturned 49 years of abortion access for women, billboards began popping up around the city of Los Angeles.

“Abortion is and will remain legal in California,” proclaimed signs that had been paid for by Black Women for Wellness, a Los Angeles-based nonprofit that advocates for the health and well-being of Black women and girls.

When the court ruled in [Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization](#) that women do not have a constitutional right to abortion, Janette Robinson-Flint, executive director of California nonprofit [Black Women for Wellness](#), wasn't surprised.

“We saw this coming and have an opportunity now to create different allies and partnerships, and I hope we take advantage of this and leverage it,” she says.

In the [majority opinion](#), the justices said the only rights protected in the Constitution – such as protection against excessive fines or the right to bear arms – are those “deeply rooted” in our history as a country. Such rights were developed by white, heterosexual men who controlled the

government at the time of the nation's founding.

California is one of more than 20 states that have abortion protections written into state law, but many other states – particularly those in the South and Southeast, where roughly 55% of the Black population lives – have adopted more restrictive laws.

As a result, for Black and other minority women, the Dobbs ruling has saddled them with disproportionate barriers to accessing abortion services.

A 500-mile trip for services

In Jackson, Mississippi, where the Jackson Women's Health Organization was the only clinic in the state providing safe abortion access after the other clinic closed in 2006, Black women are already experiencing extreme challenges.

The closest abortion clinic to Jackson is 500 miles away in Illinois, says Michelle Colon, founder of [Sisters Helping Every Woman Rise and Organize](#), a Mississippi-based nonprofit dedicated to “reproductive justice.” Colon spent six months helping Black women from Tennessee, Arkansas and Mississippi get out-of-state abortion services.

“Many of these people have never left their towns. Sometimes they have to get in the car with strange people. That in itself is a psychological attack,” Colon notes.

Some of the women keep their trips secret from their families and churches. When they return, they may delay or avoid post-abortion care because they don't want people to know they are bleeding or cramping. Some women are afraid to tell anyone what happened, says Colon, who adds she tries to “put them in contact with positive people who are counselors,” she said.

Abortion rights ‘were never about our women’

The abortion rate is highest among Black women, at 23.8 per 1,000 women, compared to 6.6 among white women and 11.7 among Hispanic women, according to data from Kaiser

Family Foundation, a nonprofit which provides information on national health issues.

Those higher rates can be attributed to factors including limited access to contraception and pregnancy planning, and a history of racist practices in reproductive health care that has led to mistrust and economic inequities that impact health, according to the Kaiser report.

Abortion rights “were never about our women, it was about white women staking their claim in business and society so they could build wealth and legacies and have independence from white men,” Colon says.

For activists like Colon, the reversal of Roe v. Wade, the 1973 Supreme Court case that established a woman’s right to an abortion, has triggered a relentless drive to help Black women stay safe and get help. That can also have significant health impacts.

“I can’t let women and girls down,” says Colon. “We are pushing our own” limits “to the detriment of our physical and mental health.”

Colon says she and other activists conduct weekly and monthly check-ins with each other to ensure depression doesn’t settle in. They try to avoid internalizing the feeling that no one really cares about Black women in Mississippi.

“The state has legally sanctioned forced childbirth and pregnancy,” Colon declares. “I can’t imagine what it feels like to be a parent or pregnant person stressing about how am I going to feed my children today and now there is no abortion clinic.”

Losing access to abortion has implications for Black women extending well beyond ending a pregnancy.

“The media paints it as if Black women have abortions as birth control,” says Robinson-Flint. “Every abortion is thoughtful. Every person who is pregnant gets to be thoughtful about if they want to continue that pregnancy or not.

Possible results of a ‘forced pregnancy’

“What is the impact of a forced pregnancy?” she asks. “How does that contribute to the health and well-being of a woman? If a child is born to a forced pregnancy, what does that mean for the economic status of the child?”

[Black women are three times](#) more likely to die in pregnancy, postpartum than white women, says the Population Reference Bureau, a longtime partner of the Census Bureau. A forced pregnancy can push that number up by 33%, she said, referring to data in an article from the [December 2021 issue of Demography](#), a research journal published by Duke University Press.

The reversal of Roe could also empower intimate partner violence by giving a violent partner another tool to inflict abuse, Robinson-Flint says. [A 2021 report from the National Partnership for Women and Families](#) indicates that many women report abuse starting or intensifying when they became pregnant.

Four out of 19 non-Hispanic Black women, American Indian or Alaskan Native women have been a victim of physical violence, rape or stalking by a partner in their lifetimes, according to the [National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey](#). [That is a rate 30% to 50% higher than what white non-Hispanic, Hispanic and Asian women experience.](#)

It took 50 years to overturn Roe, but Robinson-Flint doesn’t think it will take nearly as long to restore it, though she recognizes it likely won’t return soon enough to help some women.

“The short-term strategy (for overcoming obstacles to getting abortion services means some folks are going to be hurt,” she asserts. “We have to figure out how to get the resources that are needed to the places where they are needed. We have to engage and radicalize the people in those places to say, ‘We can do better.’”

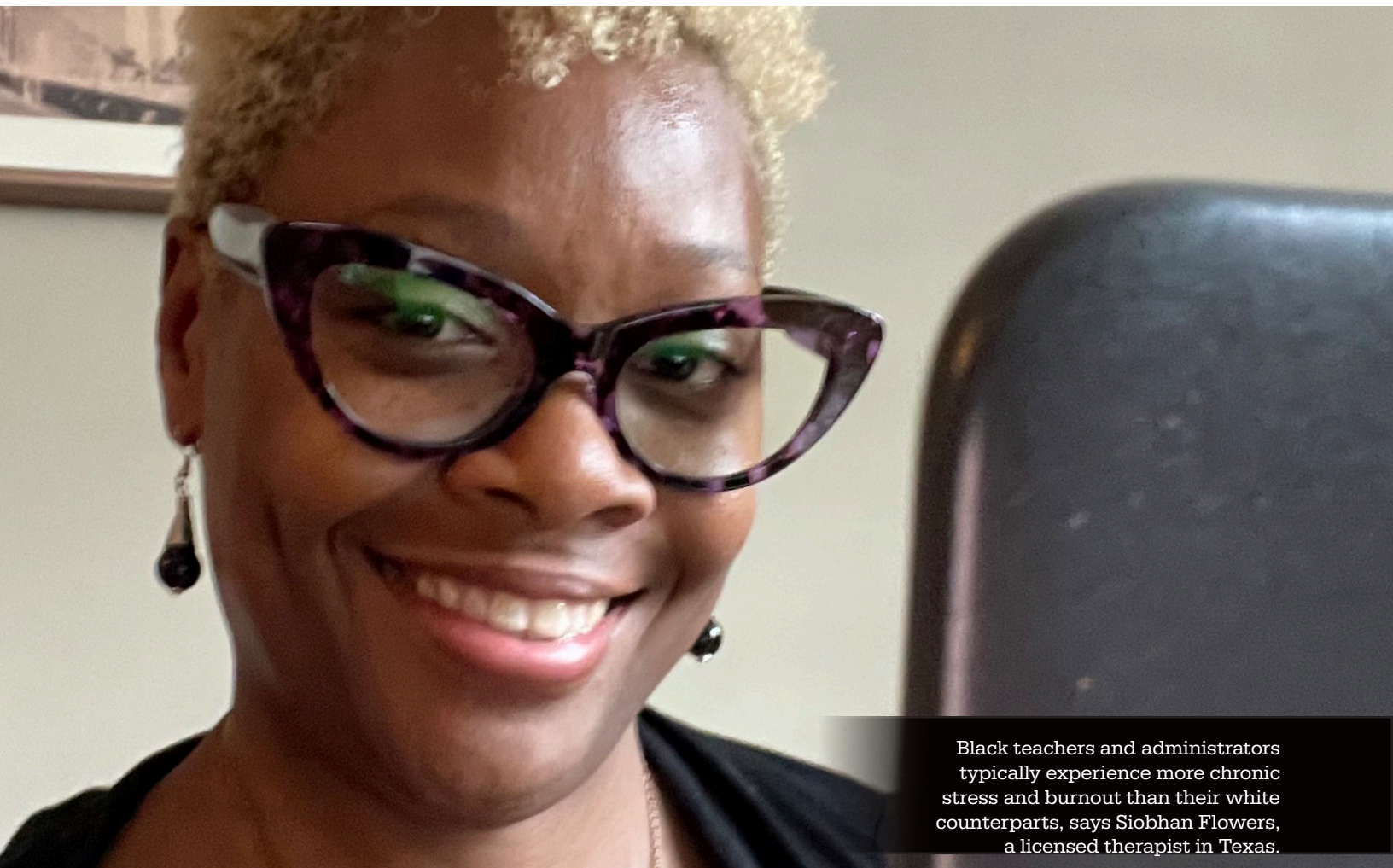
Colon says Black women and Black activists will continue to do the work they have always done, but in some ways the focus has changed.

“I have made a conscious decision to fight for and sustain those movements that pertain to issues of abortion rights and queer rights (only) for communities of color because I don’t see nobody running to help us,” she says.

Nedra Rhone is a columnist in metro Atlanta who writes about a range of topics that impact marginalized people and communities.

Janette Robinson-Flint is executive director of Women for Wellness, a nonprofit in C





Black teachers and administrators typically experience more chronic stress and burnout than their white counterparts, says Siobhan Flowers, a licensed therapist in Texas.

FEATURE / HARD LESSONS FROM THE PANDEMIC

— Ensuring a quality education for Black students was a challenge before COVID-19. Its ultimate impact on children and educators of color is still unfolding

Article by Andrea King Collier
Photo courtesy of Siobhan Flowers

There is no question that the global COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on the academic outcomes for children across the U.S. Over the past three years, the data shows that students, especially Black children, have fallen further and further behind academically and socially. And the stresses of

teaching in such challenging times has added to the turmoil in schools.

Judith Berry, Ph.D., associate vice president of strategic initiatives at Lansing Community College in Michigan, says that the students who were considered “low achieving,” had even more sizeable declines in literacy and mathematics, due to the time lost in the classroom during the

pandemic.

The digital divide is real

“Most school districts weren’t prepared to go from in-person teaching to online instruction, almost overnight,” says Berry, who adds that adults’ and students’ lack of access to computers and the internet at home contributed to the already existing academic declines. “Few homes had dedicated online learning spaces, especially with parents also having to work from home.”

The pandemic’s toll on socialization

Any educator will tell you students’ inability to mingle with their school friends in person had an impact on their mental health, as well. According to a report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the pandemic negatively

affected the mental health of school-aged children and adolescents. The CDC's report revealed that nearly one in three high school students experienced "poor mental health," and there were significant increases in teen hopelessness and even thoughts of suicide.

During school closures, there was much debate among teachers, administrators and the communities about whether the health risks of COVID-19 outweighed the short- and long-term impact on students' mental health.

"Students missed meeting at school functions and meet-ups in the community, such as at the mall, church and visiting friends' homes," Berry says. The impacts were even greater for students who did not have cellphones and other devices used to socialize with friends.

When schools reopened, Berry says, "Most students were unaccustomed to face-to-face socialization." Students and school faculty had to adjust to the new normal of being back in school." In fact, according to the [National Center for Education Statistics](#), violence and bullying in schools increased at tremendous rates.

Impact far beyond the present

According to a paper from the [National Bureau of Economic Research](#), the pandemic not only had a negative impact on the academic progress for Black and Hispanic students today but will have major impacts on their future earnings. The NBER report used testing data from 2.1 million students in 10,000 schools in 49 states and Washington, D.C., investigate the role of remote and hybrid instruction in widening gaps in achievement by race and school poverty. The report calls for schools to close the academic gaps by using the bulk of their pandemic-related aid to help students recover academically.

According to Berry, once schools slowly reopened, districts had to go into overdrive to get ready to bring them back safely and effectively. "Fortunately, they had access to the [Cares Act](#) funding to upgrade their infrastructures, including installing secure internet services in the schools, and helping to provide low or

no cost internet access for students at home," according to Berry.

Students and families are not the only ones who have suffered during the height of the pandemic and beyond. Teachers were already dealing with staffing shortfalls and overcrowded classrooms and playing catch up on student achievement, but COVID-19 seemed to be a tipping point for education as a profession.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, as reported by the [Wall Street Journal](#), more than 300,000 teachers left the field between February 2020 and May 2022. A [National Education Association](#) poll conducted in early 2022 found that 55 % of teachers said they would leave education sooner than planned, up from 37 % in August 2021. If these projections are true, they will have an impact on the academic performance of Black students especially in science, math, special education and early childhood education.

Heightened stress for Black educators

[Siobhan Flowers, Ph.D.](#), a licensed therapist in Dallas, Texas, works exclusively with Black educators at the intersection of mental wellness and education. Much of her work is specifically related to stress reduction and burnout prevention among teachers.

Flowers says Black teachers and administrators typically experience more chronic stress and burnout than their white counterparts.

"Some of them have even crossed over into anxiety and depression, and are barely hanging on," she adds. "A lot of these kind of symptoms were already present in teachers even before the pandemic, but it brought these issues to the surface."

According to Flowers, it is impossible to address the low student performance in this country without addressing what's happening with Black teachers.

Moving forward, Flowers says that interventions such as smaller class sizes, small group instruction, and structuring the day to allow educators more time for planning and preparation of lessons, can help.

"Teachers have hit a wall, and they're also finding that once they leave the profession, their anxiety, depression and their overall mental health has improved tremendously, which for me, speaks to more of a systemic problem rather than kind of placing the responsibility on the individual," according to Flowers. She says providing more mental health services in schools for both teachers and students is important.

Flowers calls for "more empathy and understanding extended towards educators and students of color because of what she refers to as racial battle fatigue." The psychosocial pressures of just being a part of a marginalized group in society, she asserts, "does add extra work, emotional labor, that other educators don't have to deal with."

Andrea King Collier is a freelance writer with a focus on mental health, based in Lansing, Michigan

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