Healing Black Trauma Starts With Universal Health Care

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In the United States, untreated mental health issues, trauma and violence continue to disproportionately affect communities of color. But what is the cause, and how do Black people combat these frequently unspoken issues? A recent op-ed on AlJazeera.com suggests that our nation's continued lack of universal health care could be to blame.

Written by Sloane Kali Faye, PhD, a New York–based sociologist, the article takes as its jumping-off point the ongoing advocacy for health care reform by progressive members of Congress who recently introduced a bill to create Medicare for All. The broad government-run health insurance program would ensure affordable, universal health care for every American.

So far, however, legislators have yet to move forward on the bill. According to Faye, failure to pass this legislation will continue to drive disparities in trauma and mental health care, especially in Black communities.

Faye draws from her own history with trauma, racism, sexual abuse and lack of access to health care as a child as well as her lived experiences as a professional writer, antiracism trainer and social justice advocate in adulthood. "It was not until I zoomed out and placed my experiences in a broader social context that I began to understand the policy constraints that make stories of my trauma so common," she writes.

The article also notes that, according to research from Mental Health America, Black Americans are no more likely than whites to be diagnosed with mental health conditions. Instead, findings show, for example, that Black kids in America face more adverse childhood experiences than their white counterparts but are the least likely of any racial group to receive support services.

Faye also challenges persistent racial stereotyping of Black people as being somehow more violent and hypersexual compared with those in other communities. "Historians have no evidence to support the idea that Black people are culturally predisposed to creating broken homes," she says. "Physical punishment of children existed in precolonial African societies, but according to a paper authored by Stacy Patton and published by the APA [American Psychological Association]: 'As colonization, slavery and genocidal violence made life harsher for these groups, parenting practices also grew harsher.'"

To break this cycle of violence and abuse fueled by America's "imperialist, white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal society," Faye observes, this nation must enact universal care for everyone.

However, this won't come to pass until "the U.S. Congress joins Black survivors in saying: 'The cycle ends with us,'" she says.

For another perspective on how universal health care could help at-risk communities across America, read "A Sick Society?"

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