Institutional Racism Affects COVID-19's Impact on African Americans

Anthony Fauci, MD, highlighted how socioeconomic status contributes to racial disparities during the coronavirus pandemic.

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African Americans are more likely to be diagnosed with the coronavirus and to die of COVID-19, the severe respiratory disease caused by the virus. While this is due to multiple factors, Anthony Fauci, MD, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, suggests that institutional racism significantly adds to COVID-19's "double whammy" effect on the Black community, reports CNN.

During a recent hearing before the House of Representatives, Fauci addressed racial disparities in the context of the pandemic and noted how economic inequities support certain conditions that place Black individuals at a higher risk of acquiring and dying of the coronavirus. Fauci explained that some African Americans can't social distance because they are essential personnel who can't work from home.

In addition, African Americans also disproportionately suffer from conditions such as hypertension, diabetes and obesity, often as a result of certain social determinants of health. These conditions that people are born into and live in, as well as the social structures and economic systems that shape these circumstances, can fuel discrimination that impedes individuals' access to quality health care.

"Obviously, the African-American community has suffered from racism for a very, very long period of time," Fauci said. "I can't imagine that that is not contributing to the conditions that they find themselves in, economically or otherwise."

Fauci's recent testimony echoes comments he made in early June when he appeared on the Department of Health and Human Services podcast Learning Curve and discussed how high infection rates among African Americans were the result of the population's economic status.

The recent findings about the impact of COVID-19 on African Americans has even prompted states to begin addressing these racial disparities in hopes of reducing the spread of the virus in Black communities.

Some states—such as New York and North Carolina—are providing temporary housing for those with COVID-19 to protect their loves ones from the risk of exposure, while others have increased testing in minority neighborhoods.

For related coverage, read "Black Americans Report Worse Effects of Bias From COVID-19" and "Why Are Black Communities Hit Hardest by COVID-19?"

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