

# Perspectives

## THE STATE OF PLAY

Each month, we examine how the mental health conversation is evolving, with a focus on youth, women, and the justice system. Last month, we explored how mental health and trauma have evolved as we approach a third year of COVID-19. This March, we will reflect on Black History Month, exploring the ideas being discussed around mental health and trauma within Black communities.

Top trends in the national conversation are illustrated below.

Takeaways include:

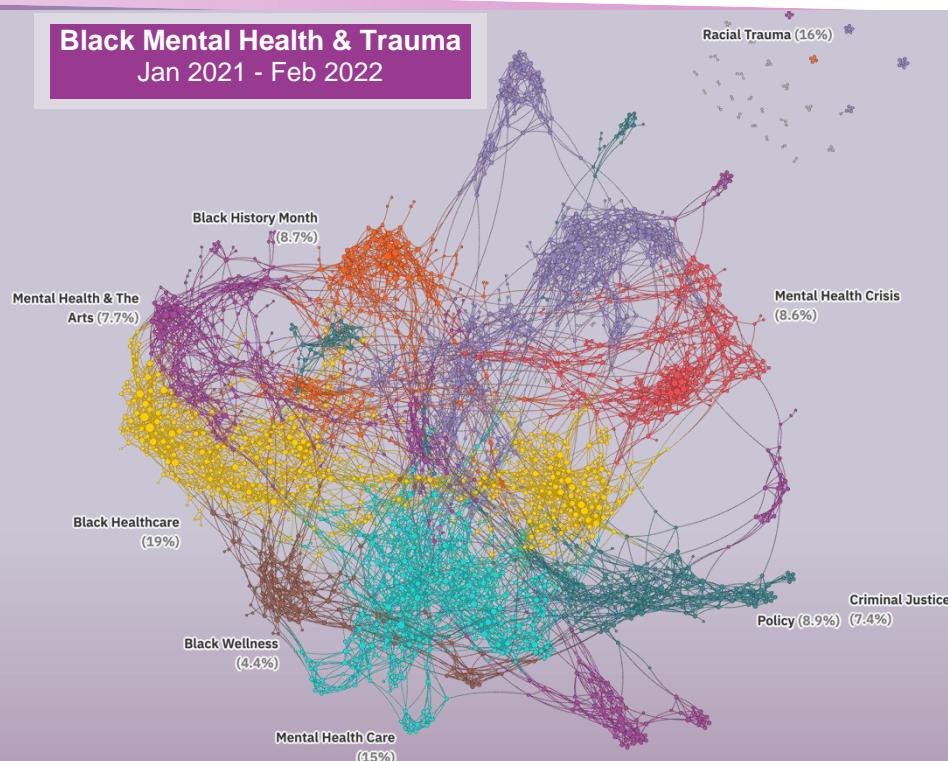
### Mental health fallout of racism among Black women: bad for all, worse for adolescents.

Researchers at the University of North Carolina surveyed 1,612 Black women in Detroit about their experiences with racism. Of the **65% who reported** experiencing racism as adolescents, over one-third reported depression afterwards. However, among Black women who reported experiencing racism as adults, they reported lower rates of subsequent depressive symptoms.

### As overdose deaths rise, Black teens are hit the hardest.

According to CDC data, **overdose deaths linked to synthetic opioids like fentanyl have tripled among teenagers in the past two years. And rates have risen five-fold among Black teens.** Worse, these numbers are predicted to rise along with the spike in drug use throughout the pandemic. Professor Michael Barnett, of Harvard's T.H. Chan School of Public Health, suggests the lack of access to mental health and addiction services is accelerating this increase among Black teens.

**Black Mental Health & Trauma**  
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### Miss USA's death spotlights realities about suicide among Black Americans.

The shock following the suicide of Chelsie Kryst exposes the gap between the reality of suicide in the U.S. and common perceptions about it. While white men account for the highest total suicide deaths in the U.S. per year, the rates of suicide deaths among communities of color are increasing most quickly. This is particularly true among Black youth and young Black adults. **From 2014-2019, suicide rates among Black people in the U.S. increased by 30%, whereas rates among white populations were declining. The highest suicide rates within the US, however, remain among American Indian/Alaska Native populations.**

## THOUGHT STARTERS

A roundup of thought-provoking pieces on mental health and trauma for youth, women, and the justice system.



### Youth Mental Health: Peer support can reduce disparities in mental health treatment for minority youth.

Mental health support needs to be both culturally and age appropriate. According to one recent study, when peer support programs account for age and culture, they can reduce racial disparities in outpatient mental health treatment:

*"The personal expertise of youth peer providers, coupled with specialized training, allows for an approach to addressing mental health issues that can enable a sense of trust and participation, as youth may feel as if their peer providers more deeply understand and can relate to their experiences – as opposed to a therapist who may not have experienced similar issues. Peer providers can also offer a sense of inspiration for youth as someone who embodies resilience and recovery, and in turn, provide hope for youth that they, too, can recover."*



### Women's Mental Health: Does the phrase "strong Black women" help or hurt?

The phrase "strong Black women" has been used to empower and create positivity. Yet it may also perpetrate a toxic mindset that endangers the physical and mental health of Black women, according to author Marita Golden. In [USA Today](#), Golden talks about her new book, *The Strong Black Woman*, emphasizing how a better approach for Black women is to prioritize self-care:

*"Over generations, the idea that we not only were strong physically and mentally but that we have to be strong in all situations has become a belief system that's deeply embedded in Black culture. African American women now are basically in a health emergency where we have skyrocketing rates of obesity, stroke, heart attack, and real issues around not getting the kind of mental health treatment we need. And while there are a lot of external reasons for that – a long history of segregation and inequality – also contributing to that is the strong Black woman complex which says that Black women really don't need to put self-care as a priority because we have to take care of everybody else first."*

### The Justice System: Stress induced by police violence may worsen Black women's health.

As Black women bear the burden of chronic health conditions due to unequal access, marginalization, systemic racism, and genetic predisposition, new research suggests police violence may also contribute. The study, led by researchers from Northwestern University, found that Black women living in neighborhoods where complaints about excessive use of police force have higher likelihood not only for PTS, but also other severe health conditions:

*"Exposure to police violence in the neighborhood may be particularly salient for women. While women are less likely to be stopped by police themselves, women are more likely to experience gendered violence during police encounters, including sexual harassment and assault. In addition, starting from a young age, women are vicariously exposed through police stops of neighbors, family members and friends. These incidents are likely to be stressful for women because they place family and friends at risk of mistreatment, violence, legal difficulties and incarceration. Stress, in turn, can trigger behavioral and physiological changes that increase vulnerability to subsequent health problems."*



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## THE PUNCHLIST

### WAYS TO TAKE ACTION THIS MONTH.

#### Read:

A) The importance of Black wellness extends beyond Black History Month. Read Mental Health America's **2021 National Minority Mental Health Awareness Month Toolkit**, which highlights alternative mental health supports created by BIPOC and QTBIPOC communities of color.

B) People who encounter the criminal justice system may lose their Medicaid coverage, which includes access to mental health services. In the current Congressional session, **some legislation has been introduced that seeks to more effectively bridge this gap**:

- [Senate Bill 285 – Medicaid Reentry Act of 2021](#)
- [House Bill H.R. 955 – Medicaid Reentry Act of 2021](#)
- [Senate Bill 2697 – Due Process Continuity of Care Act](#)

These bills could be especially important for Black communities, who disproportionately face incarceration.

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#### Listen:

In a recent episode of **Voices of NEXUS**, mental health advocate Tre Gabriel shared his story of growth and resilience after hitting what he describes as "rock bottom." As a Black man and an athlete, Tre struggled to navigate his depression due to the stigma around mental health within his communities.

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#### Watch:

For the White House's Black History Month 2022 programming, senior Administration officials DPC Director Susan Rice and SAMHSA Administrator Dr. Miriam Delphin-Rittmon hosted a discussion on **Mental Health and Wellness in the Black Community**.

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