

Racism is a Public Health Crisis

Public health is defined as the science of protecting the safety and improving the health of communities through education, policy making and research for disease and injury prevention.

Health encompasses mental, social, economic, and educational success and stability—all of which are eroded by structural racism. If US institutions want to combat racism like the public health issue it is, they need to address not only the symptoms, but its causes: the centuries-old system of oppression on black people.

Racism shapes opportunity and assigns value, based on the skin color of the individual. The result creates an implicit or explicit bias resulting in disadvantages. Racism hurts the health of our nation by denying minorities the opportunity to attain their highest level of health.

Racism may be intentional or unintentional but it operates at various levels within our society. Racism is a driving force of the social determinants of health (such as housing, education and employment) and is a barrier to health equity.

As a black woman, I find it difficult to be accepted in a society without dealing with setbacks. It wasn't until after I moved to Ohio from Maryland, that I experienced racism firsthand. It wasn't until I moved here, that I felt the suppression and defeat from the black community. I also never thought that I would experience blatant racism.

Shortly after I moved here, I had a situation in which a customer felt comfortable enough to share with me how n****rs were no good and uncomfortable, but I was the good one. To make it worse, we were the same age. I never thought anyone would feel so comfortable to portray racism in front of my face.

As a young black professional, I found myself working multiple jobs because I did not make as much money compared to my colleagues, although I had the same experience and multiple degrees. I learned that in Ohio, that I do not matter; regardless of how hard that I work, I will not receive the job, pay or respect that I deserve compared to my white colleagues.

It is quite obvious that racism is a public health crisis. Everyday, we try to overcome the feeling of anxiety, fear and stress from a society that looks down at us. I was taught from a young age that I will have to work twice as hard as everybody else, because regardless of my accolades and degrees, that I am just another black statistic.

It is imperative to recognize racism as a public health crisis, and the damage the black communities carries as a result of years of oppression.