

ON THE OCCASION OF THE 65TH COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

3RD VIRTUAL WOMEN OF THE DIASPORA SUMMIT: COVID-19 and MENTAL HEALTH

18th March of 2021, 1:30 PM EDT to 3:30 PM EDT

CONTEXT

Since 2018, the United Nations has promoted human rights in the context of mental health. The Human Rights Council in its resolution [36/13](#), recognized that persons with mental disorders face widespread discrimination, stigma, prejudice, violence, abuse, social exclusion and segregation, unlawful or arbitrary institutionalization, over-medicalization and treatment practices that fail to respect their autonomy, will and preferences.

Women of African descent are primary victims of many forms of injustice from racial biases, economic insecurity, and discrimination based on their gender, which increases their vulnerability to mental health challenges and their sense of wellbeing. Perpetration of violence and inherited trauma from long years of racism and slavery expose them to a higher risk of anxiety, depression, thoughts of suicide, PTSD and more. Despite the well documented consequences of mental health in relation to their health and wellbeing (SDG# 3), women of African descent across the diaspora have low service-seeking behavior due to the stigma surrounding mental health issues. Black women face very specific stresses that are rarely understood amongst mental health specialists. The lack of culturally competent services and easy access to appropriate treatment make it even harder for them to seek professional help when needed. For instance, studies have shown that only 25% of women of color seek mental health care during their lifetime.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Black women have experienced even greater threats to their mental health. Globally, 70% of the frontline health and social care workers—our essential workers—are women. Their risk of COVID-19 infection is high. Women have been hit hardest by jobs or business losses due to COVID-19. In America, women of color are more likely to have been laid off or put on leave, upending their careers and finances. Women also disproportionately bear the stress attached to maintaining their own and their families' livelihoods while providing long hours of invisible, unpaid work as they have cared for and educated children during the times of COVID-19 quarantine and isolation in their homes when schools closed their doors. Confinement has also increased gender-based violence in alarming rates, especially in Latin America and Caribe where the main victims are black women.

ARDN RED CARD CAMPAIGN

In the game of football (soccer), a red card symbolizes a significant infraction of the rules. The African Renaissance and Diaspora Network Red Card Campaign is a pledge to give a red card to all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls. The Campaign is part of the framework of the Pathway to Solutions 'Initiative, an international, multilateral project for the United Nations, spearheaded by ARDN to build awareness for the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals, in collaboration with various United Nations system entities, the international community, civil society, the private sector, academia, the world of sport and culture and governments.

WOMEN OF THE DIASPORA: SERIES OF SUMMITS

The *Women of the Diaspora Summits* engage leaders shaping the future, addressing the range of issues captured in the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals. In conjunction with the Red Card Campaign, ARDN's series of summits give voice to global, intergenerational experts on the topics specific to SDG#5, ending all forms of gender-based discrimination and violence. The first two summits in the series focused on gender and racial discrimination and economic equity. This third summit will address the impact of COVID-19 on mental health as experienced by women of the diaspora. Considering the 2030 SDG Agenda, the 3rd Women of the Diaspora Summit: COVID-19 and Mental Health will draw attention to SDG #3, *Good Health and well-being*, in order to achieve gender and race equality.

SUMMIT CONCEPT: COVID-19 AND MENTAL HEALTH

The United Nations established March 21st as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Additionally, March 8th marks International Women's Day. Importantly, the 1995 Beijing Declaration affirmed that the intersectionality of gender and racial discrimination causes a higher vulnerability and systematic violations in all of the areas of social life for women and girls. Therefore, discussing the issues of gender and race in March is exceptionally symbolic especially in the time of COVID-19 pandemic.

The 3rd Women of the Diaspora Summit: COVID-19 and Mental Health will be a 2-hour parallel event part of the 65th Commission on the Status of Women official agenda. The summit will focus on how women of the diaspora are among people living in the most threatening mental health conditions provoked by historical racial and gender discrimination and exacerbated by the stress and anxiety triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Intergenerational speakers from across the diaspora will address the specific mental health threats to women, such as unemployment, gender-based violence, motherhood and racial and gender discrimination, as well as best practices to improve women's mental health in the face of COVID-19 challenges.

SUMMIT OBJECTIVES

1. Bring awareness on women's mental health within the diaspora.
2. Examine the impact of COVID-19 on women's health and well-being.
3. Advocate for culturally competent and affordable services for women of the diaspora.
4. Raise awareness about the impacts of gender and racial discrimination on the mental health of women of the diaspora.
5. Address mental health discrimination as a barrier toward achieving gender equality (SDG #5).
6. Address the United Nations' efforts to treat mental health stigmas and discrimination on the right to health framework.
7. Promote the human rights in mental health.

SUMMIT FORMAT

Date: 18 March 2021 from 1:30 pm EDT to 3:30 pm EDT

Co-Moderators: Sara Branco and Beth Stroble

Opening Remarks by Co-Organizers (ARDN, UN Women, UNFPA, Republic of Costa Rica)

Statement from Special Guest

Panel Conversation (1 hour)

Main topics:

- a) Historical trauma and Institutional racism: lack of specialized treatment, “strong Black women” stereotype, lack of information (data);
- b) Gender-based violence increases during the pandemic and its impact on Black women’s mental health: Raise awareness to GBV in Caribe and Latin America – Red Card Campaign;
- c) Black women, social inequalities and the impacts of COVID-19: high rates of unemployment, confinement, motherhood (children at home) and police brutality, and fear of contracting the virus
- d) Best practices and recommendations: What is being done within communities and in public policy

Q&A 30 min

Call to Action

Closing Remarks