

The Health of Black Women

To think of the health of women is to journey to a history constructed by women's movements at various points in time which culminated with the conquest and recognition of the fact that women's rights are human rights and that they should be treated and guaranteed as such.

It is also realizing that even today there still is long way to go to secure those rights, because just as we speak there are women who are suffering physical, sexual and psychological violence, as well as unemployment, underemployment, sparse access to health care and, as a consequence, they are dying of breast and gynecological cancer, sexually transmissible diseases - HIV-AIDS among them-, as a result of abortions or their consequences.

In this state of things, I believe it is essential to stress certain important concepts, that include:

Human Rights, which are the fundamental rights for human beings. Without them, individuals are unable to develop or lead a full life.

The same applies to sexual rights, the right to live and express their sexuality without fear, without shame, free of discrimination and impositions and with full respect for the body of **his/her partner**.

Reproductive rights is the recognition of the of individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children.

To speak of black women's health means to me treading the lifeline of my ancestors and of my own life. Racism and sexism are the factors that generate greater vulnerability in the living conditions of these women.

The health of black population, particularly black women, includes many different aspects: socioeconomic, genetic, environmental and behavioral

Black Women in Brazil

According to the year 2000 census, the population of Brazilian black women was 36 million, who mostly lived in urban areas. According to IPEA, female population in Brazil is 51% of the general population, 30 percent of which are black women.

Certain Health Issues Regarding Black Women in Brazil

The life expectancy for black women is 66 years, 6 years less than for white females and 3 years less than for white males, contrary to the worldwide trend according to which women live longer than men.

Also the incidence of poverty and indigence is higher among black women; 60 percent of the households whose income is below the minimum wage are headed by black women.

The illiteracy and schooling rates among black women are 78% and 76%, respectively, while among white women said rates are 90% and 83%, respectively.

In the labor market, 56% of black women are employed as household workers.

Health Care Data– Prenatal assistance

More than 7 visits

White women - 78,28 %

Mulatto women - 58,33 %

Black women - 46,87 %

Source of Information SINASC-RJ-2005

Gynecological Assistance

In 1996, black women had less chances of taking complete gynecological examinations, while on the other hand they had higher chances of becoming pregnant at the age of 16 or less.

Child Mortality

Child mortality rate among black children – 62,3 %

Child mortality rate among white children – 37,3 %

Maternal Mortality

The relative risk of death in black women is 7.4 time higher than in white women.

Black women have a higher risk than white women of dying of:

- Diseases resulting from vulnerability. These are diseases generated by racism, influenced by social marginalization, reduced access to health prevention, diagnosis and treatments services for infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS.
- Genetically determined diseases. Sickle cell anemia and glucose-6-phosphate dehydrogenase deficiency.
- Developmental diseases aggravated by structural racism.
- Arterial hypertension, diabetes, high rates of heart diseases, high rate of amputations, chemical dependence, hysterectomies, etc.

To conclude

The health care of black women requires a new opening to the world,

- seeking to do away with discrimination and prejudice, stealthily invisible in the practices of health professionals

- actions for universal health care programs, in public policies which should consider the specific needs of African descendants and black women in particular.
- overcoming racism, sexism and homophobia in the public health policies
- acknowledging the leading role of black women in the search for solutions to preserve health, alleviate and cure.
- going up against embedded racism with public policies including affirmative actions, to improve the quality of living of the population.
- recognizing the contribution of black population and the role of black women.

Voices - Women

My great-grandmother's voice resonated in the holds of ships
 Resounded the lamentations of childhood lost.
 My grandmother's voice resonated obedience to the white people - who owned everything.
 My mother's voice resonated rebellion in other people's kitchens.
 Under rags and the dirty linen of whites along the dusty road to the *favela*
 My voice still resonates perplexed verses rhyming of blood and hunger.
 My daughter's voice takes up the speech and the deed
 Yesterday - today - now
 In my daughter's voice the echoes of life and freedom will resonate

Poem of remembrance and other moments – Conceição Evaristo – 2008