

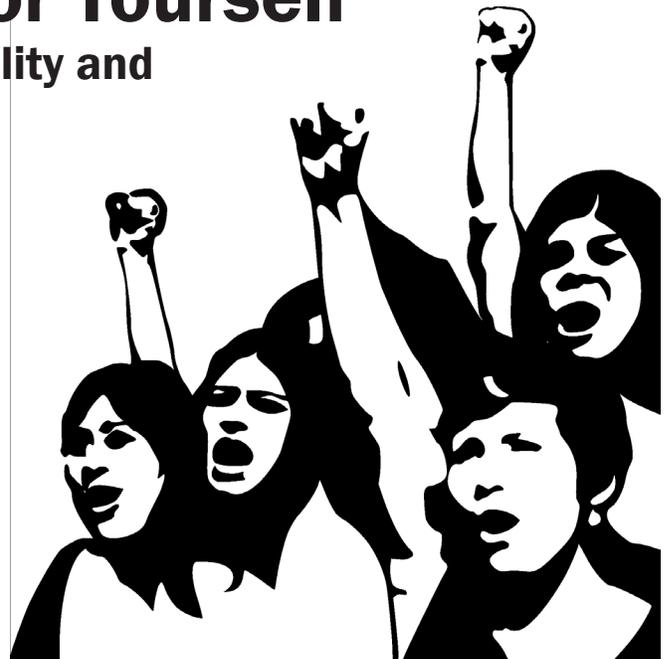
Make More Noise for Yourself

We Need to Address How Inequality and Racism Affect Mental Health

Nyasia Smiley

BEFORE YOU READ: How might inequality and racism affect mental health?

Inequality and racism affect mental health because it creates more challenges for people in poor communities and communities of color. Many people have to live with being unemployed and being shot at or arrested by the police. I have had to struggle with these things, and it broke me down mentally, countless times. I have fought to overcome these obstacles, but it has been hard, and not everyone has the resources to fight back.



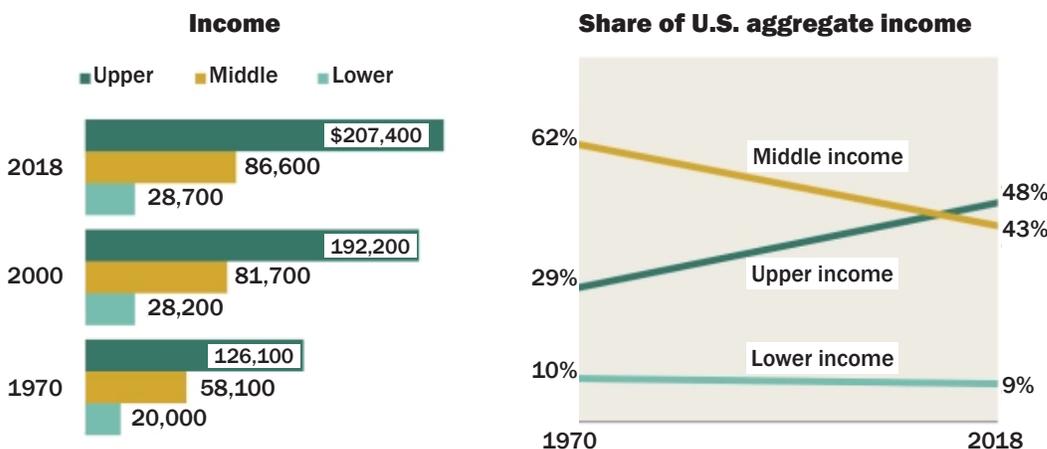
Parents Working Two Jobs

Growing up in Washington Heights, I watched my family struggle because my parents could not find jobs that paid well. As a result, my parents had to work longer hours for less pay. In

their absence, I had to learn how to deal with not being able to do many things. For example, I remember when I attended middle school, there was a NASA-inspired science program that I was interested in. They ended up rejecting me based

The gaps in income between upper-income and middle- and lower-income households are rising, and the share held by middle-income households is falling.

Median household income, in 2018 dollars, and share of U.S. aggregate household income, by tier.



<https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/01/09/trends-in-income-and-wealth-inequality/>

on my name and appearance. I think that if my parents weren't working all the time, they would have been able to advocate for me more.

Living in New York City can be very stressful and expensive since prices continue to rise. Not everyone has the education or connections to become a CEO. Although I was a child, I worried about seeing my parents have to work not one, but two, jobs in order to take care of my siblings and me.

Police Target Us

Another problem that affects our mental health is our criminal justice system. The police should be the ones to help us and protect us, but they don't; instead, they neglect us or, worse, target us. In my neighborhood, I have been a victim of police harassment and brutality. My first encounter with the police I was only 13. My friends and I were playing in the park when the police approached us and aggressively stated that a robbery had occurred in the same park we were playing in. A friend of mine stood up for us and told the officer we had nothing to do with it and that we were only 13. This didn't stop the policeman from tossing my friend on the concrete.

Since then I try avoiding police contact. If the police see you with a nice car in a "bad" community, they assume you did something illegal to get it, and they harass you for it. Not all cops are bad people. But often police label people of color as a threat, and so we have to live with the fear of being targeted by the people who are supposed to protect us.

Fight for Better Policies

Inequality and racism create stress and affect your mental health. One way to change this problem is to bring awareness to it. For example, you could start by noticing that many of the challenges you have faced are not your fault. If you blame yourself, that only adds to the stress. By making changes within, you can help to break the cycle. You could also make more noise for yourself and the others in your community that you love

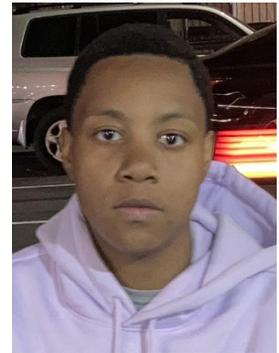
and care for. Together, you and your community could fight for policies that will make better jobs and better policing.

The more we voice our concerns, the more things will change. These acts can lead to more opportunities and more doors could open. It's up to us to make a difference.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. Study the charts on p. 12 and make several true statements about the data.
2. Summarize the author's main point. What do you think about it?
3. Read further: Study the quote in the box below and find the whole article online. Also, read the article on p. 19 (short version) or pp. 20-22 (long version) about two people who did "make noise" for themselves. How do these readings relate to Nyasia's article? Write your own response to what you have read.

Nyasia Smiley is a student at the Mid-Manhattan Adult Learning Center in New York City. She is 21 years old, and one day she hopes to be able to advocate for all people of any race and raise awareness of topics like inequality, mental health, and human rights.



Read Further

"We must create a society where people can thrive: a society where people have their basic needs of food, housing, healthcare, and job security met, but also a society where people feel loved and valued, and where people have free time for pursuits that make their lives meaningful."

— Collette Shade

"Mental Health is a Political Problem,"
[Tribune](#)