

Stress Ripples through Our Community

Ashley Patterson

BEFORE YOU READ: Describe your community and share whether there are particular stresses that “ripple” through it.

My Mom, My Dad, My Friends

Being in quarantine and working from home due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I’ve been dealing with immense feelings of guilt. My job pays a living wage, and I’ve been able to safely work during a time when others have lost their jobs or have to go to unsafe jobs. Most other Black people, especially Black women in this country, have not been so lucky.

All of my immediate friends and family are struggling. Some have lost jobs and have limited income. Others are going into work, where they have to deal with ever-changing Covid safety protocols. Everyone is stressed about getting Covid and about day-to-day survival. Like a sponge, I absorb a lot of this stress as I try to offer support to those around me.

My mother registers patients in the Emergency Room at a local hospital. She has worked this position for over ten years, and now her job is riskier than ever. She’s not receiving any extra pay, despite the increased risk of her job. My father works as a security guard. He calls me occasionally to discuss the trauma he feels from working straight through the pandemic with no pay

White families in Boston have a median net wealth of \$247,500. Black families have a median net wealth of \$8.

<https://www.bostonfed.org/publications/one-time-pubs/color-of-wealth.aspx>



An Amazon worker on Staten Island, NY, protesting unsafe working conditions during the Covid-19 pandemic. Photo courtesy of Make the Road, NY.

increase. My best friend worked in retail. She recently lost her job, and she’s stressed because she wonders how she will pay the rent and how she will find another job.

On the Front Lines with No Safety Net

Prior to Covid, all of us were working paycheck to paycheck, and now we’re doing the same with far more fear in our hearts. We are drained mentally and physically. Our country was built by our Black people, but we’ve never experienced fair and livable wages and conditions. And now during this time of historic loss (as I write, more than half a million dead from Covid), Black people are disproportionately serving as “essential” workers with little to no increased pay, benefits, or recognition. We are having to rely heavily on community and mutual aid for survival.

Somehow, during the pandemic, the

Black and Latino workers in Massachusetts were 4x more likely to die than white workers during the first 5 months of the pandemic.

American Journal of Industrial Medicine, [ajim.23227.pdf](https://doi.org/10.1002/ajim.23227)

Black Americans in the Workforce

11.5%	All workers
17%	All frontline workers
26%	Public transit workers
19.3%	Childcare and social service workers
18.2%	Trucking, warehouse & postal workers
17.5%	Health care workers
14.2%	Grocery/drugstore workers
12.6%	Janitorial workers

Source: Center for Economic Policy Research: Economic Policy Institute

Study the data shown in the bar graph. Write down several true statements about the data.

rich have gotten even richer, while the people doing the essential work remain some of the lowest paid. This disconnect – this injustice – is wrong in so many ways, including it’s bad for our mental health! We are in a constant state of anxiety about our jobs, our finances, and our survival.

The pandemic shows that we need solidarity to survive. For example, we need a public health system that truly takes care of everyone. We need an economy that sees the value in all people, treats everyone with respect, and pays everyone a living wage. Instead, we have an economy that treats some people like they are dispensable.

We Are Interconnected

We must continue supporting each other to ensure our survival. Remember to check in on your loved ones. Always tip your delivery servers. Support mutual aid groups. Support unions and labor struggles that improve wages and working conditions. Connect to grassroots organizations in your community that are fighting for something you care about.

And don’t forget to take care of yourself! During these hard times, I have my self-care strategies (and you should too!). I’ve been making sure that I am getting enough sleep, eating regularly,

and exercising when I can. Every day is difficult, but I remind myself to be kind to myself and others. When I feel overwhelmed, I try to take naps, watch television, take showers, and center myself to decrease my anxiety.

We are interconnected, and we are all trying to survive. The mental health of one person depends on the mental health of all of us. The suffering that we are experiencing ripples through me, and my family, friends and community, but my people are resilient! I will continue to support those around me and ensure that I prioritize my mental health. We are more than this moment, and that is a mantra that I am holding near and dear to my heart each and every day.

Sources: <https://www.epi.org/publication/black-workers-covid/>
<https://www.brookings.edu/research/black-essential-workers-lives-matter-they-deserve-real-change-not-just-lip-service/>

AFTER YOU READ:

1. According to the author, what is the stress that ripples through her community?
2. Read the text and study the data in the boxes. How does this information support the author’s argument?
3. Write an essay about a type of stress that ripples through your community. How does it affect the mental health of your community members?

Ashley Patterson is a Boston native, currently residing in Dorchester. She works for a reproductive justice organization and is an organizer for City Life/ Vida Urbana, a housing justice organization.

