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Studies have shown that systemic racism often means that people of color and those belonging to other marginalized ethnic groups do not receive the mental health support they need. In this Special Feature, we explore the impact of racism as a public healthcare hazard in the mental health arena.

In this Special Feature, we look at how racism impacts community-wide access to formal mental healthcare support.

Recently, Fiona Godlee — editor-in-chief at the *BMJ* — wrote a column in which she called racism "the other pandemic."

"Racism is suddenly and at last everyone's business, and acting against it is everyone's responsibility," she points out.

Action has been a long time coming. For years, studies from around the world have shown that <u>systemic racism blocks access</u> to healthful lifestyles and appropriate

healthcare among consistently marginalized groups — particularly people of color. Despite this, decision makers have done little to address these inequities.

In some of our recent features at *Medical News Today* — which are part of an ongoing series about race-related health disparities — we have discussed how and why the COVID-19 pandemic has [disproportionately hit](#) Black communities, and how the pandemic is likely to [impact the mental health](#) of people of color.

Now, we look at how racism has forever been an obstacle blocking people's access to appropriate formal mental healthcare among those in marginalized ethnic groups.

We acknowledge that "people of color" is a very general term that encompasses numerous groups and identities, each of which has faced subtly different forms of racist discrimination. The same goes for the term marginalized ethnic groups.

However, the aim of this feature is to provide an introduction to the impact of racism on mental healthcare. Future features will look at how racism has affected health and healthcare access in distinct marginalized groups more specifically.

Health inequities affect all of us differently. Visit our [dedicated hub](#) for an in-depth look at social disparities in health and what we can do to correct them.

The impact of institutional racism

Many forms of racism can be very subtle. [Microaggressions](#), such as making assumptions about a person in conversation, often go unnoticed except by the person or people on the receiving end.

In a personal essay called "On Becoming a Psychologist" — which appears in *The*

"Growing up as a Black girl in a majority-

Its author, Sirry Alang, Ph.D., found that Black individuals reported mistrust in mental health service systems due to experiences of racism.

Black respondents — particularly those who had been through higher education — reported that they had experienced stigmatization, and that professionals had minimized their mental health symptoms. This resulted in a lack of access to appropriate care.

– Riya Patel, Ph.D.