

# Racism and racial trauma as barriers to breastfeeding

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African American mothers continue to have the lowest breastfeeding rates, even as the breastfeeding rates have risen in the U.S. over the past 25 years. Racism is an important barrier to breastfeeding, as examined in Part 2 of a special issue on "Breastfeeding and the Black/African American Experience: Cultural, Sociological, and Health Dimensions

Through an Equity Lens," published in the peer-reviewed journal *Breastfeeding Medicine*.

The special issue is led by Guest Editor Sahira Long, MD, a pediatrician and lactation consultant.

Exploring how racism creates barriers to breastfeeding for Black mothers and how Black women resist racism during their quest to breastfeed are Catasha Davis, Ph.D. and Aubrey Van Kirk Villalobos, DrPH, Milken Institute School of Public Health at the George Washington University, and coauthors. In their article, the authors identify three forms of institutionalized racism as significant barriers to breastfeeding: the historic exploitation of Black women's labor; institutions pushing formula on Black mothers; and lack of economic and employer-based support.

"Institutional support for breastfeeding from employers and hospitals is an essential ingredient for countering institutionalized racism," state the authors.

In the article "Reimagining Racial Trauma as a Barrier to Breastfeeding versus Childhood Trauma and Depression among African American Mothers," Maria Muzik, MD, Michigan Medicine and colleagues examined the relationship between several maternal risk factors and breastfeeding status at 6-months postpartum.

"We found that African American mothers had reduced rates of [breastfeeding](#) at 6 months, above and beyond all the other risk factors in the model," said the researchers.

Arthur I. Eidelman, MD, Editor-in-Chief of *Breastfeeding Medicine*, states: "This two-part Special Issue addresses the multiple facets of this ongoing public health crisis, and will assist in mobilizing our nation's

resources in remedying the consequences of institutionalized [racism](#)."

**More information:** Arthur I. Eidelman, Breastfeeding Medicine and Studies on the Black/African American Experience and Breastfeeding: Part 2, *Breastfeeding Medicine* (2021). [DOI: 10.1089/bfm.2021.29186.aie](#)

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