

# research snapshot

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## African American Women Have a Disadvantage When it Comes to Cancer Care

### What is this research about?

Research shows that when it comes to breast cancer care and survival, African American women have a disadvantage compared to non-Hispanic white women. It has been suggested that there are biological reasons for this disparity. But it has also been argued that social and economic factors play a role. Indeed, some researchers have found a link between a lack of health insurance and later cancer diagnoses, lack of access to treatment, and poorer survival. And African Americans, because of their socioeconomic status, often don't have the health insurance coverage they need.

The last generation has seen great leaps in breast cancer care. But have these advances been enjoyed by all equitably?

### What did the researchers do?

A team of researchers in Ontario and Detroit looked at 25,997 breast cancer care cases in Detroit. They compared the experiences of African American women and non-white Hispanic women. They also compared older Medicare-eligible and younger non-eligible women. Two cohorts – one spanning 1975 to 1980, the other 1990 to 1995 – were followed.

### What you need to know:

Race has an impact on breast cancer treatment and survival. Non-Hispanic white women are more likely to survive breast cancer than African American women. Younger women are especially vulnerable. They tend to lack adequate health insurance.

### What did the researchers find?

Non-Hispanic white women with breast cancer are much more likely to survive for five years than African American women. This is especially true for young African American women who are not yet Medicare-eligible. When comparing older African American women and older white women, the divide has not increased significantly. But a divide still exists.

African American women with breast cancer have not fully benefited from recent advances in cancer care. They appear to be more disadvantaged today than they were a generation ago. Younger women, especially, are disadvantaged; they are much more likely to be inadequately insured. Although biological differences should not be ignored, they probably cannot explain the disparities between the way African American and white women experience breast cancer care.

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### How can you use this research?

This research may be of interest to researchers, policymakers, and healthcare workers. Policymakers should note that factors like race play a role in shaping women's access to health care.

### About the Researchers

Kevin M. Gorey is Epidemiologist and Professor of Social Welfare in the School of Social Work, University of Windsor.

Isaac N. Luginaah is Associate Professor in the Department of Geography, UWO.

Kendra L. Schwartz is Professor and Chair in the Department of Family Medicine and Public Health, Wayne State University.

Karen Y. Fung is Professor Emerita in the Department of Mathematics and Statistics, UWO.

Emma Bartfay is Associate Professor in the Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Ontario Institute of Technology.

Frances C. Wright is a Surgical Oncologist at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Center.

Uzoamaka Anucha is Associate Professor in the School of Social Work, York University.

[anucha@yorku.ca](mailto:anucha@yorku.ca)

Madhan Balagurusamy and Renee R. Parsons are Research Associates in the School of Social Work at the University of Windsor.

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### Keywords

Breast cancer, Social determinants of health, Race, African American women

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### Knowledge Mobilization at York

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[kmbunit@yorku.ca](mailto:kmbunit@yorku.ca)

[www.researchimpact.ca](http://www.researchimpact.ca)

