



Evaluating the Impact of Slavery on Health Disparities: Elevated Rates of Illness in the African American Community

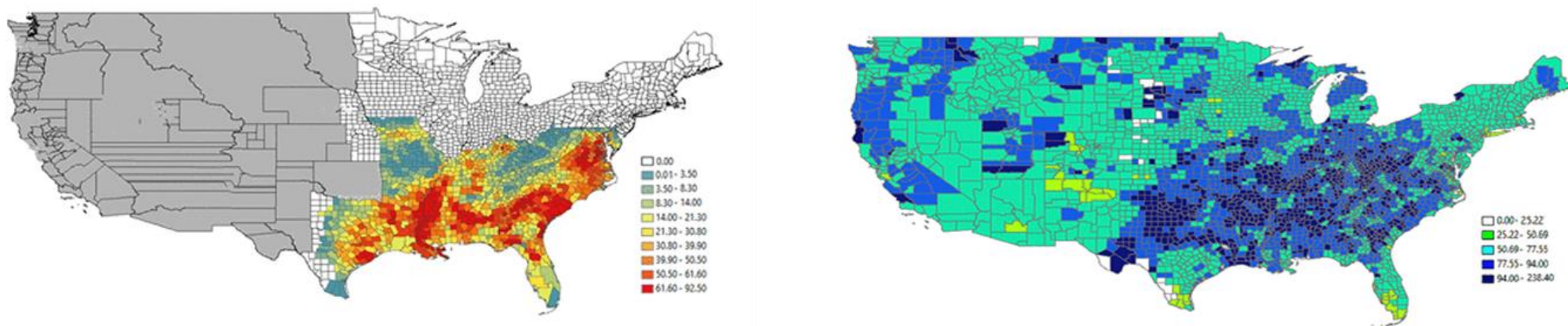
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Abstract

“The legacy of slavery still shadows the American health-care system. The inequalities of the health system were built in from the beginning,” said former Harvard College Dean Evelyn M. Hammonds.

The legacy of slavery as a persistent issue in the U.S. healthcare system is a complex and deeply rooted problem that stems from historical injustices and systemic inequalities. This issue manifests in various ways, including disparities in health outcomes, access to healthcare, and the overall well-being of African Americans. The roots of this issue trace back to the era of Slavery, where ancestors of African Americans endured harsh living conditions, inadequate nutrition, and limited access to basic healthcare. Slaves faced a higher susceptibility to diseases, leading to negative health outcomes and higher mortality rates. This not only affected slaves, but continues to affect African American descendants negatively. In the modern healthcare system, the legacy of slavery is reflected in persistent health disparities between African Americans and white Americans. Several factors contribute to these disparities, including socio-economic inequalities, lack of access to quality healthcare, discriminatory practices, and historical mistrust of the healthcare system among African Americans. These persistent health disparities among African Americans in the U.S. are deeply intertwined with the historical legacy of slavery. Recognizing and addressing this legacy is essential for creating a more equitable and just healthcare system.

Geographic Patterns



Charles Ezenwa, Stroke, Historical Slavery and Modern-Day Stroke Mortality in the United States Stroke Belt, Volume: 49, Issue: 2, Pages: 465-469, DOI: (10.1161/STROKEAHA.117.020169) © 2018 American Heart Association, Inc.

The present findings illustrate the alignment between regions historically marked by high concentrations of enslaved individuals and contemporary patterns of stroke mortality, as evidenced by the Figures.

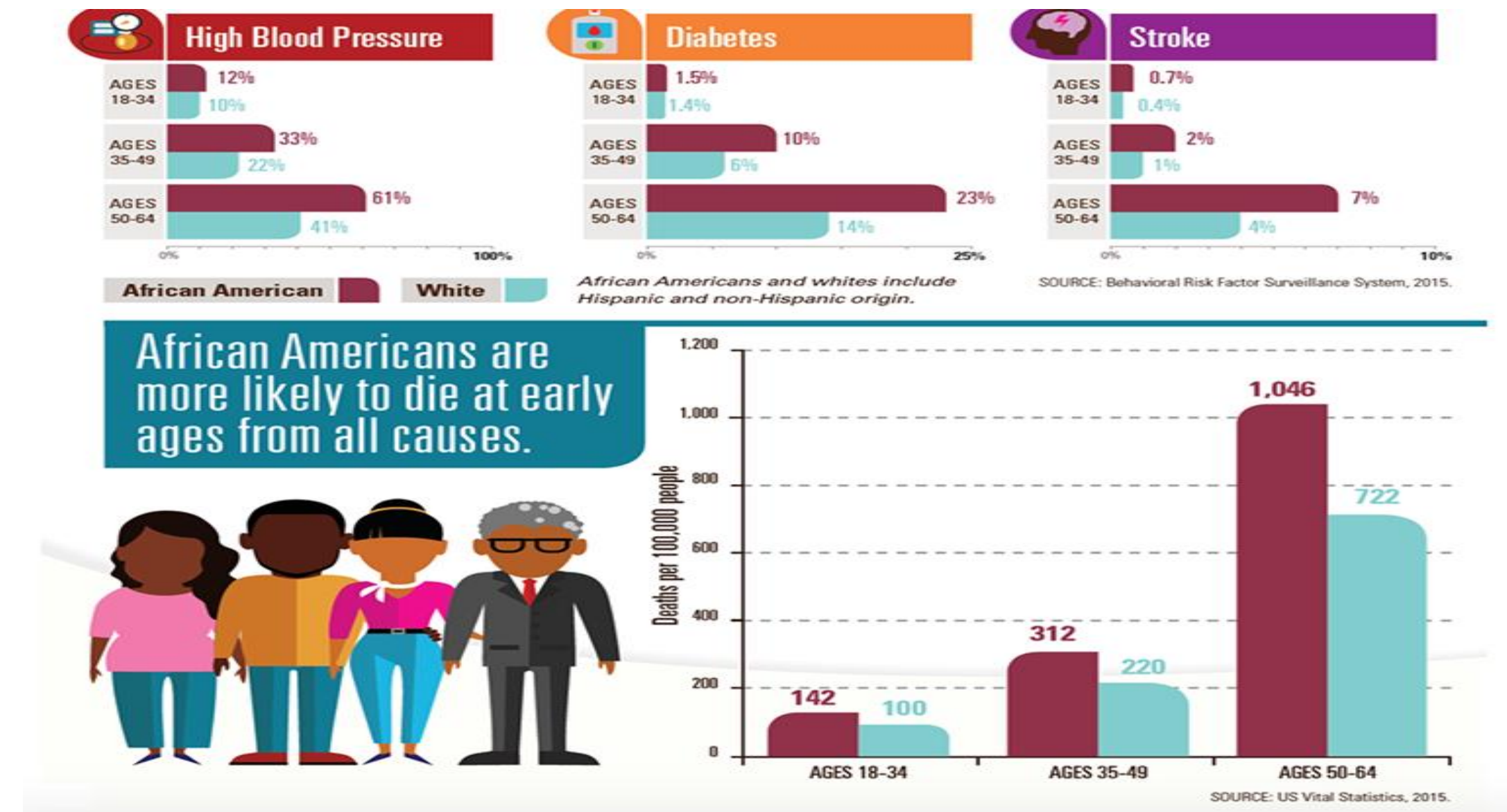
Further Explanation:
Shown above, the high concentration of stroke mortality in the US aligns with the geographic outlines of the locations that slaves were imprisoned.

The indicated stroke patterns highlight the racial disparity : African Americans are at greater risk of stroke than any other group in the US; risk of experiencing a first stroke is about twice as high for blacks than for whites.

Structural Racism Today

Heightened Rates and Incidences of illnesses and diseases are more prevalent in the African American community due to Structural Racism.

- **Diabetes:** Higher among adult African Americans at 11.3% compared with White Americans at 6.8%,
- **Hypertension:** 41.3% compared to White Americans 28.6%
- **Premature Death from Heart Disease:** Higher among African Americans than White Americans (65.5 vs. 43.2 per 100,000 persons).
- **Prostate Cancer:** are 208.7 vs 123.0 per 100,000 persons in African Americans vs White Americans



Challenges

“A genetic component to these gaps.”

- A 2015 systematic review examined genetic data from 2007 to 2013, to evaluate if racial health disparities in cardiovascular diseases have roots in African American DNA.
- Results concluded minimal evidence to suggest a genetic component to these gaps. Further reinforcing why we in the field of healthcare must continue to advance a conversation about the true drivers of racial health gaps.

Post Traumatic Slavery Syndrome (PTSS)

Post traumatic slave syndrome (PTSS) is defined as “a condition that exists when a population has experienced multigenerational trauma resulting from centuries of chattel slavery and continues to experience oppression and institutionalized racism today.”

- The Trauma of Enslavement is argued to have been carried by African Americans and manifest in contemporary social, psychological, and physical problems (Akbar, 1996; DeGruy, 2017)
- As a result, African Americans show comparatively poor **physical, psychological, and social health outcomes** :
 - **Major Depressive Disorder:** 57% of Black Americans experienced chronic depression with more acute symptoms compared with a rate of 39% among Whites
- **Homicide Rates:** Higher among Black Americans compared with White Americans at 23.1 versus 2.7 per 100,000 population
- African American men are 5 times more likely to be incarcerated than Caucasians at 1,408 versus 275 per 100,000 population
- **Current Poverty Rates:** Black Americans is 27.4% compared with 9.9% of White Americans and Black unemployment (13.4%) is double that of White unemployment (6.6%)

Solutions

To address the health inequities faced by African Americans in the United States, implementing the following reforms within the healthcare system may be effective:

- Trauma-Informed Care
- Healing-Centered Engagement
- Cultural Competency Initiatives
- Evidence-based policy changes
- Funding Healthy Equity Research
- Increasing History teachings centered around Slavery
 - Chronic Disease Management Programs
 - Funding Public Health Literacy Programs
 - Diversifying the Physician Workforce

Citations

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