



EDITORIAL: PARENTS, ESSENTIAL WORKERS, AND CONTINUING MENTAL HEALTH DISPARITIES

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During the first week of December, 78 people died of COVID-19 in Massachusetts alone (Kaufman, 2022). This is an increase from about 50 per week in the preceding three months. We are pretending to be in a post-COVID ecology, just as we are pretending to address mental health disparities. Respiratory ailments are also very high, causing difficulties in families, and interrupting work and respite for parents. Essential workers, such as teachers, truck drivers, nurses, therapists, and warehouse workers, among others, have seen small gains in income wiped out by inflation.

Mental health workers continue to be underpaid and overworked, with little thought or resources directed toward developing more structural change. As indicated in prior editions of this journal, therapists, social workers, and psychologists are leaving the field in waves that are not replaceable. Anxiety is higher now than ever before, leading to alarming climbs in depression and suicide. Suicide rates in 2022, according to the CDC, continue to climb, with rates in New England ranging from 16.4 citizens per 100,000 per year dying from suicide in Maine and New Hampshire, to 8.4 per 100,00 in Massachusetts.

This does not take into account the peripheral damage of suicide to families and friends. Nor does it take into account the unmediated damage to others. Commuter rail train engineers *frequently* have to endure persons running across the tracks with the intent to die. Some engineers have had this occur more than *three or four* times in the last several years. In every case, the totality of response by the managing company, Keolis Commuter Services, is 3 days off with no mandated mental health counseling.

This industrial response is a metaphor for what is occurring more systemically, not only in other industries and occupational groups, but in the entire population. The suicide rate for police officers is higher than any other vocational group. And the suicide rate for Black men is higher than any other citizen group. From 2014 to 2017, death rates from overdoses of synthetic opioids in majority-Black urban areas increased 818% (Farahmand, et al, 2020).

This is a journal for those family, relational, and systemic therapists who are battling the effects of dysfunctional systems. In working with families and parents, we are attempting to counterbalance the effects of racism, homophobia and transphobia, ableism, sexism, misogyny, and ageism, one session at a time.

In this edition of the journal, we focus on parenting. Parents are under stress from every direction, from the randomness of serious illness to themselves and their children, to increasing occupational and economic instability, from everyday racism, to a profound lack of support from a crumbling mental health system.

We seek to uncover the voices of New England therapists and are soliciting ideas for interviews, articles, and journalism from this local ecology.

Works Cited

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Kaufman, A. (2022, December 13.) COVID-19 cases are rising in the US, prompting New York City, Los Angeles to encourage masking. *The Boston Globe*.
<https://www.bostonglobe.com/2022/12/13/nation/covid-19-cases-are-rising-us-prompting-countrys-two-largest-cities-encourage-masking/>