

Abstract

Anti-Racism Law: Black Hair, Human Rights, and Health Equity

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APHA's 2019 Annual Meeting and Expo (Nov. 2 - Nov. 6)

In the black community, hair and hairstyles have strong historical, political, cultural, social, and familial significance in terms of identity. Such hairstyles include afros, braids, bantu knots, locs, African thread styles, twists, fades, and leaving hair in various forms of its natural state. Unfortunately, individuals have been discriminated against on the basis of the expression of this cultural identity and practice of natural hair/hairstyles. This has resulted in a number of inequities in activities of daily living such as lack of employment opportunities, discrimination in the workplace, discrimination in school settings, job loss, microaggressions and much more. In a number of case studies, individuals have been told to conform to the dominant culture for assimilation and upward mobility further promoting racist stereotypes. There is strong research evidence on the adverse effects of different forms of discrimination on health, social determinants of health, and equity. In February 2019, the New York City Human Rights Commission instituted a historical ban making it illegal to discriminate against individuals of Black/African descent based on natural hair/hairstyles. This session will consist of a panel of legal experts, public health experts, and individuals with lived experiences to further explore this law, case studies, and health equity as part of a community of solutions. Some topical highlights include health impacts of discrimination, existing laws at the city, state, and federal levels, potential implications for hair anti-racism laws for health equity and social justice, and possibilities of expanding this as part of a national agenda.

Diversity and culture Public health or related laws, regulations, standards, or guidelines Public health or related organizational policy, standards, or other guidelines

