



THE **sage** PROJECT

## Empowering Black Women in San Diego

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P A 497 – Investigation and Report

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INSTRUCTOR |

## Disclaimer

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## About Sage Project

The Sage Project is a large-scale university-community partnership program housed within the Center for Regional Sustainability at San Diego State University (SDSU). Sage collaborates with local communities in the greater Southern California and Northern Baja region to engage students, through their coursework, in meaningful, real-world projects that address pressing social needs in SDSU's service area. Students from across the University assist the community with partner-directed projects that address their livability and sustainability goals. SDSU students and faculty connect with high-priority, high-need, highly interdisciplinary community projects, thereby generating interest and fresh ideas that create momentum and provide a real service to the community. Each year, the Sage Project engages hundreds of students from diverse disciplines who collectively invest thousands of hours assisting communities in our region as they seek to build a more equitable and sustainable future. The Sage Project is a certified member of the Educational Partnerships for Innovation in Communities (EPIC) Network, an international nonprofit organization that connects university resources to the needs of local governments through implementation of the EPIC Model. This Model unites the human capital of universities with local governments and communities to improve the quality of life and social wealth for all involved.

## About the Partnership with Jewish Family Service of San Diego

For the 2024 calendar year, the Sage Project entered into a partnership with Jewish Family Service of San Diego (JFSSD) on a large-scale partnership to support the launch of an initiative to support low-income Black women, known as the Black Women's Resilience Project. The Black Women's Resilience Project aims to support 35 low-income women of African descent and their families with up to \$1,000 per month for 18 months, while also evaluating the impacts of cash and a supportive network of services. The program will prioritize the 39 Health equity ZIP codes in San Diego County. The partnership has been supported by a \$50,000 contract from JFSSD to the SDSU Research Foundation, the fiscal agent for the Sage Project. These funds were matched in part by \$50,000 in university base funds that support the Sage Project. The combined funds have allowed for the Sage Project to cover operational expenses associated with the partnership, to include staffing, coordination of site and classroom visits, incentives for research participants, the hiring of report writers, and the generation of class reports that serve as official deliverables to JFSSD.

## Executive Summary

According to Moslimani et al. (2024), underpinned by the US Census microdata from 2022, the Black population of the US is growing, from 36.2 million self-identified Black people in 2000 to an estimated 47.9 million people in 2022; this is an increase of 32% in two decades, making up 14.4% of the country's current population. In the same period, San Diego County showed an increase of 14% between 2000 and 2022, with the Black population comprising 6.7% of the entire region's demographics. When we zoom in on gender, the population of Black women has increased by only 4% during this timeframe, due to the self-identified mixed-race population, which rose from 21,296 in 2000 to a plateau of 34,507 in 2024, an increase of 62%. However, in the same period, the self-identified Black alone population has shrunk by 13%, ranging from 74,998 to 65,479. Even though the big numbers might indicate a more diverse society, they conceal challenges that must be addressed, especially for Black women in American society. With that in mind, this specific Sage Project partnership investigated the multifaceted challenges and strategies for empowering Black women in San Diego, focusing on economic disparities, political underrepresentation, social support, healthcare access, and cultural representation. Students from Professor Roberto Ivo's P A 497 Investigation and Report class conducted a series of structured and unstructured interviews on and off-campus, comprising a sample of 20 individuals for each area of interest (5 in total), to map out challenges that require immediate action and initiatives that are already underway. Key findings revealed persistent economic and social disparities in the community due to historical discrimination, the vital role of community activism and cultural representation, the critical need for increased political representation, and the healthcare disparities faced by Black women. Strategic recommendations include implementing inclusive economic programs, enhancing political advocacy, developing comprehensive healthcare solutions, strengthening support networks and mentorship, and promoting cultural and community engagement. Overall, this work underscores the necessity of centering Black women's voices and experiences in efforts to achieve social justice and systemic change, aiming for a more equitable future for Black women in San Diego.

**Keywords:** empowering Black women, inequality, social disparities, intersectionality, discrimination, cultural representation, mental health

## Introduction

In 2024, Jewish Family Service of San Diego (JFSSD) backed the Black Women's Resilience Project, a new initiative to support low-income Black women, aiming to promote economic mobility and build generational wealth. Through a partnership between JFSSD and the Sage Project at San Diego State University (SDSU), students from P A 497 Investigation and Report focused on the following milestone of the partnership: "Historical Past-Present Analysis: Detail economic mobility obstacles and opportunities for Black women and other communities of color in the San Diego County region."

This research project explored the multifaceted challenges and strategies for empowering Black women regarding economic and social mobility, particularly within the San Diego context. By addressing economic disparities, political underrepresentation, social support, healthcare access, and cultural representation, P A 497 students sought to provide a holistic understanding of the systemic barriers Black women face and the avenues available for their empowerment.

This report is broken down into four main case studies. The first one provides a general overview of the literature on social and economic mobility for Black women in San Diego and outlines what hinders their progress. Historical discrimination, limited access to quality education and healthcare, and barriers to wealth accumulation continue to marginalize Black women.

The next case study analyzes the complex intersection of race and gender, which uniquely affects Black women's experiences and opportunities for empowerment. Understanding this intersectionality is crucial for addressing their specific needs.

Following that, the importance of community activism in supporting Black women is discussed. Initiatives such as the North County African American Women's Association (NCAAWA) and the Black Infant Health Program (BIH) are essential in providing support and advocating for systemic change.

The third case study emphasizes the importance of political representation in improving legislation to meet Black women's needs. There is a significant underrepresentation of Black women in political spheres, impacting their ability to influence policies that affect their lives. Empowering Black women politically is crucial for achieving broader social justice and equity.

The final case study focuses on Black women in leadership roles, who often feel marginalized. Despite this, they continue to exhibit resilience and tenacity in overcoming structural obstacles.

Overall, this work underscores the necessity of centering Black women's voices and experiences in efforts to achieve social justice and systemic change, aiming for a more equitable future for Black women in San Diego.

## **Socioeconomic Disparities**

The empowerment of Black women has become an important focus for researchers who recognize the historical economic and social injustices that have hindered their progress (Moslimani et. al., 2024). This research explored various aspects of Black women's empowerment and provided insights into their unique problems and experiences, through a qualitative survey that gathered data on attitudes and perceptions about the experiences of Black women in San Diego. In lieu of this approach, a quantitative analysis was performed so as to capture statistical trends related to gender and race, and how these intersections shape different pathways to empowerment. Modern issues, such as lack of political representation and limited opportunities, highlight the importance of empowering these groups and removing barriers to their advancement in society.

According to Spinner-Halev (2007), addressing the long history of discrimination and its marginalizing effects is crucial. Despite significant advancements over the years, disparities caused by racism and discrimination persist in areas such as access to quality healthcare and education, as well as the ability to accumulate wealth for future generations. By delving deeper into these issues, we can better understand the opportunities the Black population faces and implement inclusive solutions for empowerment. Indeed, the Pew Research Center, in the beginning of 2024, showed that almost one-third of the US Black population lived under \$25,000 a year in 2022, and one-half at around \$50,000 (Moslimani et al., 2024). This is significantly less than the average household income in the entire American population, which comprises \$74,580 in 2022. This can be partially explained by the fact that 43% of this population has attained high school levels (or less) in terms of educational level when compared the total population at 37% (US Census, 2023). In other words, there is a reduced opportunity for continued education and consequently to improve the household average income for Black individuals.

One key theme within the literature are the persistent socio-economic disparities faced by Black women. For instance, Dowe (2020) has shown that Black women often encounter inequality in areas such as education, healthcare access, job opportunities, financial stability, and wealth maintenance. These disparities are rooted in historical injustices and ongoing biases. Addressing these systemic challenges is essential for creating a more equitable environment for all (Dowe, 2020). Still, the population of Black women achieving a bachelor's degree or higher is similar to or higher than that of their male counterparts (US Census 2022b). However, when it comes to female householders, with no spouse present



in the family, the US Census (2023) appoints a medium income of 80% (\$47,740) of that of their male counterparts (\$62,760), which highlights a wage gap inequality.

Understanding the historical context of systemic racism and its lasting effects on Black women's empowerment is another focus. Spinner-Halev's (2007) work highlights the effects of slavery and segregation on Black communities, including the difficulty in building trust in established societal institutions and the lasting psychological trauma experienced by Black women. These legacies play a significant role in shaping avenues for Black women's empowerment. In that respect, intersectionality has emerged as a vital framework, emphasizing the connectedness of race, gender, class, and other social identities. Clerge (2023) has explored how these factors influence experiences of discrimination and resilience among Black women, by acknowledging these intersecting layers, to develop more inclusive and effective empowerment strategies.

Moreover, the literature discusses the role of political representation and community activism in advancing Black women's empowerment. Increasing representation in decision-making spaces and promoting grassroots initiatives are seen as essential steps toward creating meaningful change, amplifying Black women's voices, and enhancing their ability to shape political policies and societal norms (Dowe, 2020).

## Analysis

Conducting research into the empowerment of Black women requires a methodological approach that truly captures the complexity of their experiences and challenges; in this case, a mixed-method analysis was applied to capture the narratives of Black women and gain insights into their lives. For instance, Dowe (2020) conducted extensive interviews with Black women from various backgrounds to explore their political ambitions, providing a better understanding of the challenges these women face while navigating the political sphere and advocating for change.

Community involvement research is also crucial for understanding empowerment within the specific context of the Black community in San Diego. This approach involves collaboration with community members that translates into realistic ideas for the empowerment that this particular community needs.

The importance of an intersectional framework when studying Black women cannot be understated. Intersectionality acknowledges that individuals' experiences are shaped by race, gender, and other identities, such as sexuality. Researchers like Clerge (2023) emphasize this perspective when considering Black women's experiences in various aspects of life, including work, household, and community positions. This approach also highlights Black women's resilience in facing discrimination and advocating for their rights.

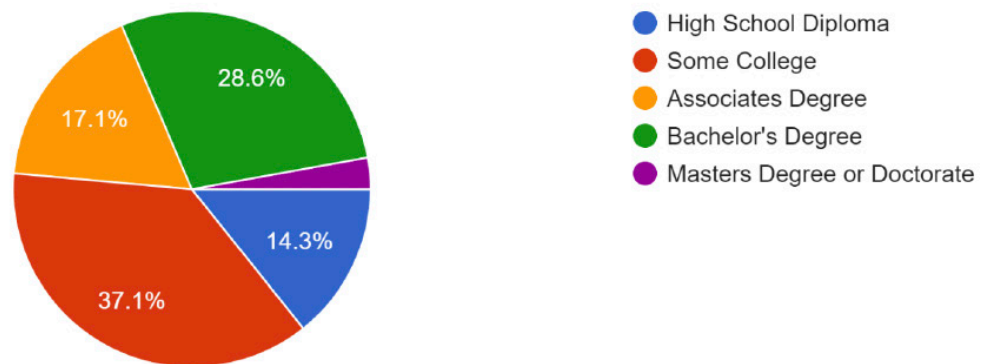
A group of P A 497 students conducted a survey with 35 Black women in San Diego, which revealed that many face barriers in pursuing personal and professional goals. Respondents indicated that support systems, such as affordable childcare, housing, mentorship, and networking, are essential for empowerment.

Many of these women also stated feeling like having access to resources and platforms to speak out would be beneficial to empowerment as would having public services that are specifically catered towards assisting struggling Black women with needs such as affordable childcare or housing. Other respondents also suggested wanting more mentorship or networking systems as well as educational workshops for younger students to promote their growth. The data also showcases the narrative that these women do face certain disadvantages more often than non-Black women.

Regarding educational attainment and average income of survey respondents, Black females within San Diego specifically were often making at or below what is considered the poverty level at nearly \$60,000, and, overall, about one third had attained a bachelor's degree. (See Figure 1.)

### What is the highest level of education you have attained?

35 responses

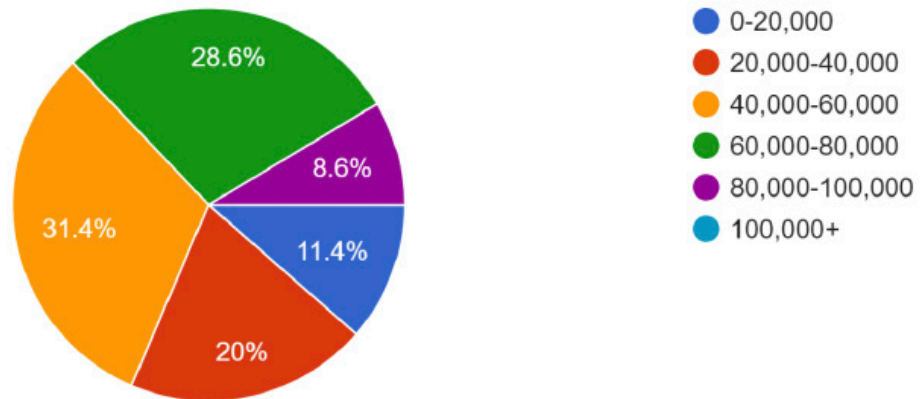


**Figure 1.** Educational attainment by respondents .

The survey results also showed that only about 30% of respondents make more than \$60,000 thousand annually (Figure 2). By also comparing US Census data (2022) we can clearly see the reasons why this causes disparities, as an average family earns nearly \$100,000 in San Diego, whereas the average Black family earns only 60% of that average (US Census Bureau, 2023).

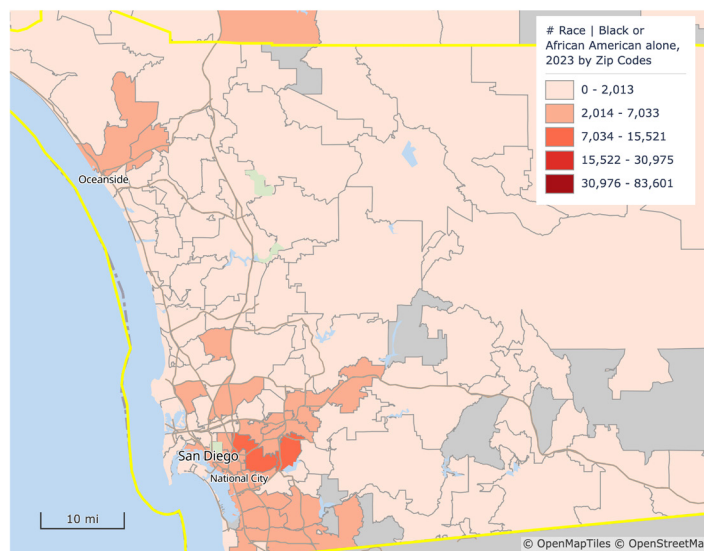
### If you are employed, how much do you earn on average

35 responses



**Figure 2.** Average income by respondents .

The US Census data also highlights the potential of feelings of isolation associated with being in a White-dominated society, as only 6.7% of San Diego residents are Black, whereas the average for the US population as a whole is 14% (US Census Bureau, 2022). Indeed, using SimplyAnalytics GIS application (Figure 3), these statistics are mapped, showcasing the challenges of isolation in the city, since they are concentrated in the outskirts of the city, as well as downtown.



**Figure 3.** Neighborhood concentration by race: Black Americans. Source: SimplyAnalytics.

A student-conducted interview with Mrs. Thompson, a Black and Hispanic woman living in San Diego, further emphasizes the importance of empowerment. Mrs. Thompson's experiences highlight the barriers she faced despite her hard work and the importance of self-love and respect in professional success. Per Mrs. Thompson:

“I remember talking but felt like my voice was overlooked and despite working harder than my peers I kept hitting new barriers and these feelings followed me into my work life. Despite these feelings I haven't [let] them define me and I keep working and learning to love myself more and more.”

Empowerment should begin at an early age, during school years, when foundational support systems can be established.

## Recommendations

In summary, by exploring the complexities around empowerment for Black women we have discovered the challenges and resilience of Black women and the pathways towards change. Through the lens of political representation, historical legacies, intersectionality and community-based changes, we have insights that help guide us towards action and translate our information towards equitable change and a better society. Promoting empowerment in political representation helps amplify the voice of Black women and change the policy-making process while bringing up the issues that matter to these communities. At the same time recognition of the historical challenges that continue to shape the landscape politically and economically for Black women is vitally important. Recognizing slavery and segregation as the root causes for so many disparities helps to end the cycle of disadvantage. As well, it is important to keep intersectionality in mind to view Black women's experiences as unique and realize practical solutions to address these specific challenges in various different parts of their lives.

## Intersectionality and Mental Health

Our research on intersectionality and mental health is couched in the perspective that trauma-informed healthcare is key to the empowerment of minority women. Considering the evidence highlighting perceived discrimination and racism as significant contributors to numerous inflammatory-based chronic conditions (Reshi & Sudha, 2023), proper healthcare ought to be considered a non-negotiable empowerment strategy. By supporting initiatives that focus on preventive care and mental health support, culturally competent healthcare providers can address the unique health needs of Black women, which translate to success in all other aspects of their lives.

In their research on broader economic empowerment, Reshi and Sudha (2023) adminis-



connectivity between healthcare and economics was a striking pattern that emerged in the search, emphasizing the intersectionality of gender and race within healthcare discussions (Figure 4). Notably, the concept of “Woman” stood out prominently, reflecting the specific lens through which Black women’s health is approached. Moreover, our analysis revealed a significant concentration of studies investigating healthcare issues specific to Black women, with particular emphasis on understanding the underlying factors contributing to health disparities. However, there was a noticeable gap in studies addressing the healthcare needs of young adult Black women. Additionally, limited attention was given to mental health concerns within this demographic, especially regarding trauma-informed healthcare approaches.

## Analysis

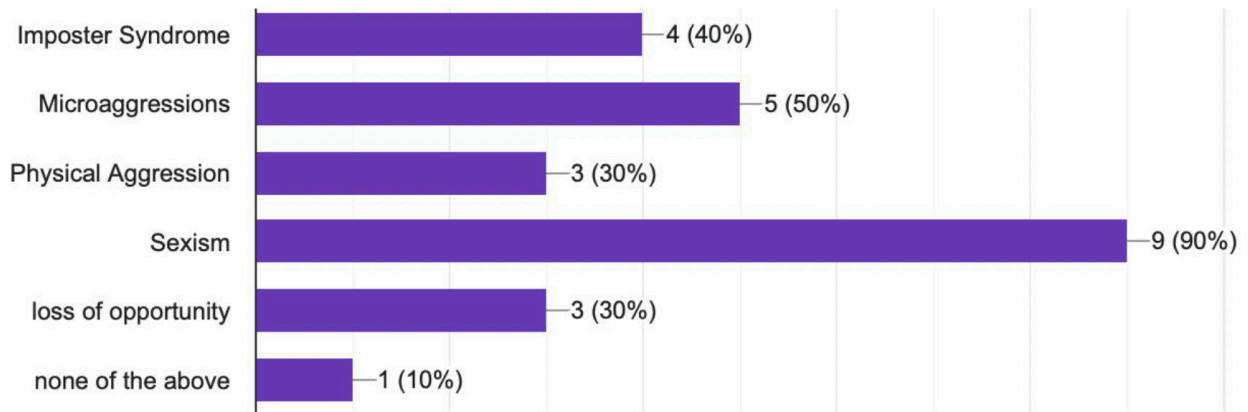
Another group of students in P A 497 designed a survey questionnaire to collect data on college participants’ perceptions, experiences, and attitudes regarding mental health awareness, economic welfare, and mentorship. A brief 15-minute interview also was conducted with a volunteer randomly selected from the focus group of 30 individuals to personify mental health challenges within the San Diego community of Black women.

The majority of respondents fell within the 18 to 25 age range and identified as female. While all respondents had successfully graduated high school, the majority identified as having some college experience but no degree. Racial backgrounds of participants included White, Black, Asian, Iranian (Middle Eastern), and Hispanic/Latino; however, a majority were White with only 40% Black respondents.

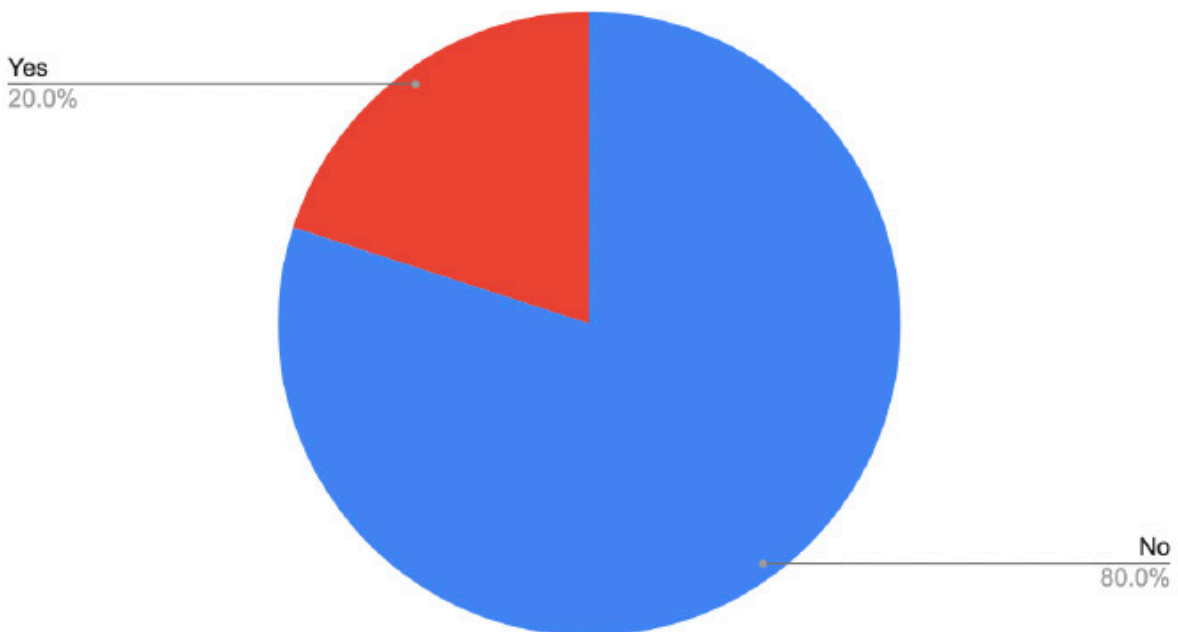
Examining survey responses, various forms of bias and prejudice were reported, including imposter syndrome, microaggressions, sexism, physical aggression, and loss of opportunity. These experiences occurred predominantly in school, at work, and in close relationships, highlighting the pervasive nature of bias across different contexts. The majority of such experiences were in the workplace, underscoring the potential effects of race-related stress in the workplace and the need to foster inclusive environments in the workforce.

As shown in Figure 5, participants rated their stress levels on average around 6 to 7 on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest). This could be due to the demographic reached (college students), and may be attributed to high levels of stress due to study-related issues rather than race-related stress.

While most participants reported experiencing a decline in mental health in the past 6 months, a significant proportion – 80% of respondents – had not sought help regarding mental health (Figure 6). There was variability in receiving formal diagnoses from mental health professionals, suggesting potential barriers to accessing comprehensive mental health care.



**Figure 5.** Sources of stress identified by respondents



**Figure 6.** Percentage of respondents seeking mental health services.

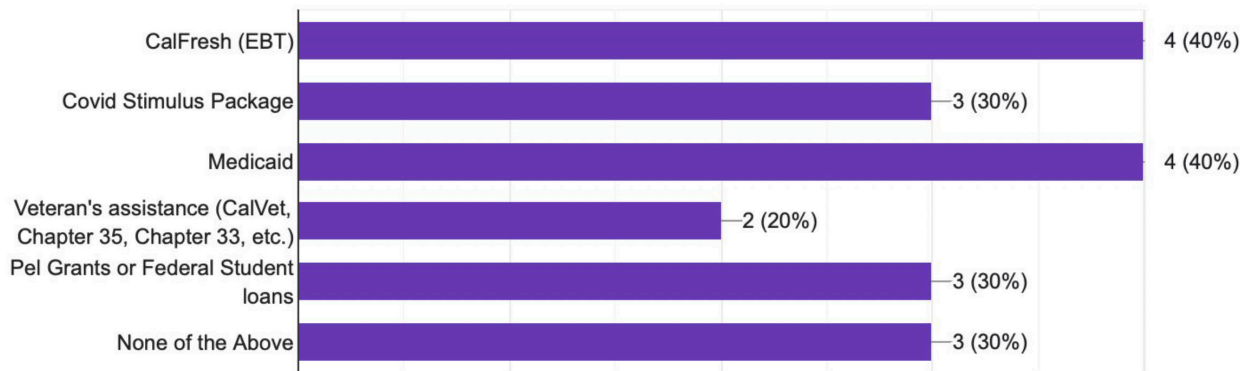
US Census data from 2023 (Table 1; KFF n.d.) show that the California populous rate of mental health issues is on par with national averages. The percentage of individuals utilizing the federal program Medicaid underscores the need for the expansion of such programs.

**Table 1.**

Mental Health Search within Private or Public Insurance (KFF, n.d.).

	California	United States
Percent of all adults with symptoms of anxiety and/or depressive disorder	31.7%	32.3%
Percent who reported an unmet need for counseling or therapy	28.5%	28.2%
Among adults with any mental illness the share who have private insurance	59.3%	59.6%
Among adults with any mental illness the share who have Medicaid	29.7%	21.6%

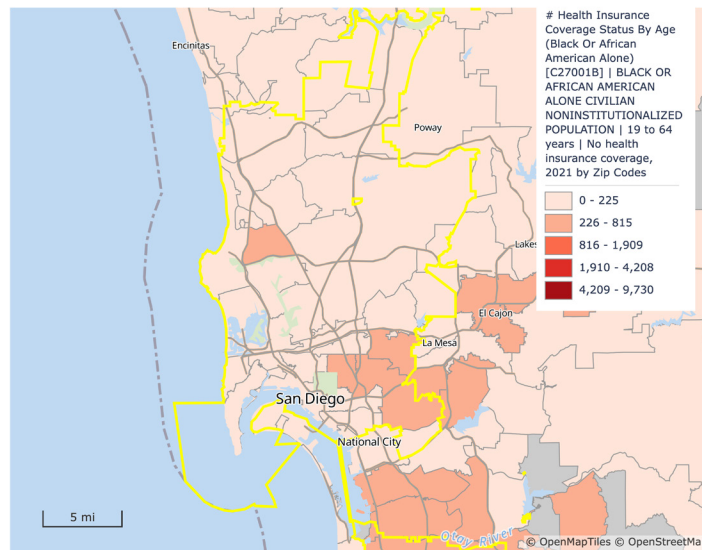
Most survey participants reported receiving government financial assistance, including CalFresh (EBT), Medicaid, Pell Grants, Federal Student Loans, and COVID Stimulus Packages. This could be due to the demographic reached (college students) and, as mentioned, may be attributed to high levels of stress due to study-related issues rather than race-related stress.



**Figure 7.** Use of federal health programs

However, when analyzing demographic data on SimplyAnalytics (Figure 8), it is notable that Black households comparatively lack health insurance coverage, especially in east San Diego, downtown and south of the city. This disparity in healthcare can exacerbate existing health inequalities, leading to poorer health outcomes among Black communities.





**Figure 8.** Health insurance coverage among Black Population in San Diego. Source: SimplyAnalytics.

P A 497 students interviewed Amera Bishop, an SDSU alumna and criminal justice major, who provided valuable insights into the challenges of mental healthcare within the university context. Ms. Bishop highlighted a significant lack of diversity in student life, recounting her experiences as the sole Black athlete on the women's water polo team at SDSU. She also faced similar challenges growing up as one of the few women of color on her local swim team. The absence of representation contributed to her struggles with imposter syndrome as a young athlete, exacerbated by prejudiced assumptions regarding the swimming abilities of Black individuals.

During her sophomore year, Ms. Bishop sought support from university psychological services, only to discover that the institution offered a mere six free therapy sessions on campus before referring students to external providers. She identified this limited access as a significant barrier to providing comprehensive mental healthcare within the university community.

After graduation, Ms. Bishop completed peer counseling training through her local church, which equipped her with conflict resolution skills. Despite being the sole female and person of color during her scuba dive training, she relied on her counseling training to navigate the mental challenges associated with imposter syndrome. As she embarks on a career in military defense, Ms. Bishop aspires to serve as a beacon of inspiration for women of color in both aquatic pursuits and broader professional contexts.

## Recommendations

Enhancing access to comprehensive mental healthcare, reducing stigma, and promoting awareness are essential for addressing mental health challenges among Black women. The presence of reliable role models and mentors has been identified as a critical source of guidance and inspiration for young Black women. Investing in mentorship programs and leadership development initiatives can significantly empower Black women, enabling them to navigate challenges and achieve their goals effectively.

Empowering Black women in San Diego necessitates a multifaceted approach that addresses systemic barriers, promotes economic stability, enhances mental health support, and fosters inclusive and supportive communities.

## Community Activism

This section examines the broader societal issues involved in empowering Black women in California, recognizing their marginalized status and the multifaceted challenges posed by underrepresentation. It emphasizes the critical importance of addressing these issues, highlighting their implications for social justice, equity, and community development.

Racial and gender disparities significantly influence the perception of Black girls in the community. Many of these girls, especially those in juvenile correction centers and foster care, are adversely affected by stereotypes. Simmons-Horton et al. (2023) state, “Grooms (2020) reported that Black foster youth are more vulnerable to experiencing homelessness, substance abuse, mental and physical health challenges, and criminalization as they navigate their survival in systems of oppression.” In general terms, Simmons-Horton et al. also discuss how Black women are often unable to express themselves freely without being perceived as violent. They also note that many children in foster care or dysfunctional homes are Black, arguing that these children face greater struggles due to their circumstances, which affect them mentally and physically.

Our research indicates that a significant issue within the Black community is the lack of educational opportunities necessary for starting businesses or obtaining leadership positions. However, we identified organizations that support the Black communities that warrant recognition. For example, Samonae Carter founded the Southern California Chapter of Black Women Invest ([https://www.instagram.com/blackwomeninvest\\_/](https://www.instagram.com/blackwomeninvest_/)), focusing on financial education. Similarly, DeMilo Young established the BIPOC (Black Indigenous and People of Color) Support Foundation (<https://www.bipocsupportfoundation.org/>), a nonprofit that helps people of color achieve higher education and financial support. These women aim to empower their communities by providing previously unavailable opportunities.

As Black women continue to advocate for their rights and achieve their goals, more leadership roles will become accessible to them. Geneviève Jones-Wright, a Black woman, has announced her candidacy for the mayoral seat in 2024. She speaks out against harmful stereotypes and the challenges Black women face when opposing authority figures. Her candidacy is empowering for many young Black girls, demonstrating that it is possible to advocate for what is right, even in the face of opposition.

Another example of empowerment is Dr. Akilah Weber, current California State Assembly member and a doctor who founded San Diego's Rady Children's Hospital Pediatric and Adolescent Gynecology Division at the UCSD Health Department. Her success in a challenging field serves as an inspiration for younger generations, motivating other Black women to challenge themselves and feel empowered.

Many Black women have struggled economically without support, leading them to create groups and associations to empower themselves and others in similar situations. Dolan (2019) offers reasonable solutions for empowering Black women in San Diego. Dolan focuses on the North County African American Women's Association (NCAAWA; <https://www.ncaawa.org/>), which provides empowerment to marginalized community members, especially Black women. Their annual Gentlemen's Gourmet Fundraiser has raised over \$447,000, helping 250 Black women attend various educational institutions, including universities, trade schools, and graduate studies. NCAAWA promotes intersectionality to help Black women understand and embrace their identities. This concept aids Black women in overcoming discrimination and self-defeating beliefs, encouraging them to see themselves as equals to their non-Black peers.

## Analysis

Indeed, the academic literature shows that mental health and physical health play a huge role in the lives of Black women. With the use of VOSviewer, we mapped out keyword co-occurrences that shed some light on Black women empowerment, intersectionality, Black feminism, socioeconomics, social stigma, leadership, and psychology in the US, during the period of 2019 to 2024 (Figure 9).

Another group of P A 497 students conducted a survey to investigate the experiences of women in the workplace and leadership roles in San Diego, particularly within the Black community. This survey shed light on the injustices faced by Black women, highlighting both gender and racial discrimination.

Participants from various economic, social, and cultural backgrounds contributed to the survey, providing a diverse range of experiences. Of the 32 respondents, 80.6% were women, and the primary issues identified were sexual harassment, lack of opportunities,



Sylvia's upbringing in National City, a diverse neighborhood predominantly comprising Hispanic and Asian ethnic groups, provided her with a sense of security and inclusivity. However, she encountered discrimination in high school from peers who shared her racial background. Being of both Black and Mexican heritage, Sylvia faced rejection from some Black classmates who deemed her "not Black enough," leaving her feeling isolated.

In her twenties, while working as a receptionist at a White-owned business in Logan Heights, Sylvia discovered she had been hired merely to fulfill diversity quotas rather than for her qualifications. Despite such experiences, she persevered, continually reminding herself that being Black is not a negative trait. She struggled with societal perceptions that painted Blackness in a negative light but ultimately embraced her identity, recognizing the uniqueness and strength it brought to her life.

Sylvia learned to disregard others' judgments and take pride in her Black heritage, embodying resilience and self-acceptance as she matured. Despite the loss of her father at a young age, she was determined never to dishonor or feel ashamed of her Black heritage. She held onto this belief, striving to emulate her father's character and refusing to let societal prejudices tarnish her perception of her identity. Sylvia recognized that goodness transcended racial boundaries and sought to embody the same integrity and kindness her father had instilled in her, regardless of external judgments.

Thus, empowering Black women in San Diego requires a multifaceted approach that addresses systemic barriers, promotes economic stability, enhances mental health support, and fosters inclusive and supportive communities. By prioritizing the intersectional needs and experiences of Black women, we can work towards building a more equitable and inclusive society for all.

## **Recommendations**

A key strategy for empowering Black women is the implementation of affirmative action. County officials should adopt policies that specifically prioritize Black women to ensure equity and equality. These policies could mandate a specific percentage of Black women in leadership and professional positions and increase their enrollment in colleges and universities. Additionally, the government must take measures to protect Black women from violence and racial discrimination.

Through this exploration, we identified governmental initiatives and community efforts aimed at bridging the socioeconomic and healthcare disparities affecting Black women. Select scholarship programs are available for Black students, as highlighted on Bold.org (Table 2).

**Table 2.**

Bold.org Scholarships Programs for Minorities. Retrieved from: <https://bold.org/scholarships/by-demographics/minorities/black-students-scholarships/>

Scholarship Programs	Amount
Concrete Rose Scholarship Award	\$ 2,300
Alexis Mackenzie Memorial Scholarship for the Arts	\$ 9,350
C. L. Scholarship for Black Women in Engineering	\$ 1,475
Minority Women in LAS Scholarship	\$ 2,000

Moving forward, it is imperative to continue advocating for policies that promote equity and equality for Black women. These include affirmative action measures and increased access to educational and leadership opportunities. Additionally, fostering awareness and understanding of the unique struggles faced by Black women, as highlighted in our research, is crucial for effecting meaningful change. By amplifying the voices of Black women, recognizing their contributions, and providing avenues for empowerment, we can strive towards a more inclusive and equitable society in San Diego and beyond. The journey towards empowering Black women is ongoing, but with continued dedication and collaboration, we can work towards a future where all individuals can thrive.

## Leadership and Political Representation

In a San Diego Magazine story, Muhammad (2023) examines Café X, a coffee shop in Southeast San Diego founded by Khea Pollard, which is aiming to economically empower the Black community in San Diego. Pollard, a former policy advisor to Supervisor Greg Cox at the County of San Diego, is an expert in empowerment with a master’s degree in nonprofit leadership from the University of San Diego. Muhammad addresses the question: “How do we build something in our community that can withstand economic downturns by collectively pooling our resources, activating our skills and talents, and investing in preparing the next generation of leaders?” Pollard highlights a significant issue facing Black San Diegans: Many have moved away due to the high cost of living.

Muhammad’s story uses personal history to emphasize the purpose of Café X, noting that, “[f]or Pollard, the days of a thriving and cohesive Black community in San Diego are barely a memory. But her mother...recalls a time when Black San Diego businesses were blossoming

in Southeast San Diego, with hair salons and barber shops, clothing stores, restaurants, and street fairs that celebrated Black culture” (Muhammad, 2023).

Café X aims to reunite the Black community in San Diego. Even the name of the cafe is significant, inspired by Malcolm X and his ideology. Café X explores empowerment through “a model of worker and consumer ownership and is pursuing ownership of their own space.” The cafe symbolizes Black ownership and challenges the notion that “Black people must work to earn life,” a concept rooted in slavery (Muhammad, 2023). Muhammad’s story highlights Pollard’s efforts to empower the Black community in San Diego through a coffee shop that serves much more than just cappuccinos.

In 2022, the report titled, “An Economy for All: Building a ‘Black Women Best’ Legislative Agenda,” released by the Congressional Caucus on Black Women and Girls (CBWG, 2022a), details how centering Black women in policymaking would benefit not only Black women but also achieve a more equitable and just future for all.

The report outlines a significant issue: Black women are often the last to recover from economic downturns and the last to benefit from economic prosperity. The report emphasizes that by centering and “intentionally [creating] policies that pull Black women out of economic precarity and into economic prosperity, then everyone will benefit” (CBWG, 2022a).

The associated press release for the report (CBWG, 2022b) includes quotes from several Congresswomen stating their support for empowering Black women through policies. Congresswoman Yvette Clarke states,

“It is time to reorient our thinking and deliberately bring Black women from the margins of our society to the center and create policies to pull them out of poverty...Our aspiration is to establish a clear policy agenda that will address the inequities that have historically and disproportionately burdened and oppressed Black women and girls. These policy solutions will focus on creating opportunities and investments to propel Black women toward economic progress.” (CBWG, 2022b)

The report’s focus is on economic equity, empowering Black women in an unprecedented manner. By emphasizing economic growth, the report argues that a variety of opportunities will present themselves to the Black community.

Congresswoman Watson Coleman adds, “[w]hile the Black Women’s Best agenda offers several important policy proposals, at its heart is the need to center policy on equity” (CBWG, 2022b) The report underscores that policymaking should focus on overdue equity to empower Black women to a higher level. “Black women have been intentionally left behind in our economy for generations,” said Congresswoman Robin Kelly, who stressed how policymaking can elevate Black women to the forefront of the economy (CBWG, 2022b).

The report includes support from women in leadership positions, emphasizing the importance of centering policies around Black women, who have been oppressed for generations. Janelle Jones, the architect of the Black Women's Best framework, asserts, "The way to economic growth that provides security and stability for all is possible. And the blueprint is here" (CBWG, 2022b). Azza Altiraifi, co-chair of the Black Women Best Working Group and senior policy manager at Liberation in a Generation, states, "[p]ursuing a Black Women Best legislative agenda is about pulling Black women out of economic precarity and into economic prosperity, which is only possible when all interlocking oppressive structures are dismantled" (CBWG, 2022b). Springboard to Opportunities CEO Aisha Nyandoro concludes, "[o]ur economy could not function without Black women, and yet we are overlooked when economic policy is crafted to benefit others" (CBWG, 2022b). The report consistently relates back to overdue equity, advocating that empowering Black women through policies will uplift their economic status and eventually lead to other opportunities for success.

## Analysis

Another group of students in P A 497 conducted a survey that, although with few respondents (9 in total), highlights some interesting facts already mentioned before. Participants in this survey ranged in demographics from age, race, and gender making the recorded results extremely insightful in answering the research question. A seven of the participants were female, two of whom were Black. All respondents had also lived in San Diego for more than 11 years. When asked what resources would be most empowering, a third of respondents chose money. The second most popular choice was tied between more representation and job opportunities. Money is the ultimate resource that can potentially unlock limitless opportunities.

### What would empower you most?

9 responses

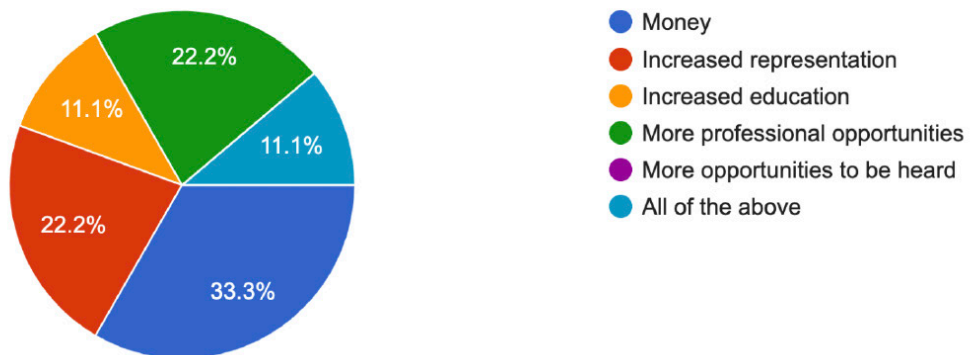


Figure 10. Empowerment options by respondents.



As shown by the results of the survey (Figure 10), women also value representation in order to challenge stereotypes of the working Black woman. These findings suggest that there needs to be more governmental support and representation for Black women in order to thrive.

Highlighting Khea Pollard's Café X provides Black women with a vital role model and leader. By embodying the principles of mentorship, Pollard serves as an inspirational figure for Black women in San Diego, encouraging them to pursue business ownership and thereby elevating their social status. An increase in Black-owned businesses will result in more job opportunities for Black women in San Diego, fostering economic empowerment within the community.

Muhammad (2023) underscores the historical significance of Southeast San Diego as a former hub of Black empowerment, noting that Pollard aims to restore the region to its previous prominence. This initiative not only promotes the empowerment of Black women through a shared mission but also challenges the stigma that the Black community must work to earn their place in society.

The CBWG emphasizes the importance of centering Black women in policymaking. By prioritizing Black women in future policies, their economic status will improve. Financial stability is a critical resource in any society, and increased economic resources will lead to greater opportunities for empowerment, including access to higher education, healthcare, and business ventures. Policies focused on Black women address long-overdue equity within society, enabling Black women to thrive and succeed in all aspects of life.

## **Recommendations**

In summary, narrowing the focus onto the San Diego region unveiled a plethora of programs designed to empower Black women. Moving forward, advocating for policies and programs that promote equality for Black women is of utmost importance. Increased awareness of self-image, more Black business ownership, and several policies centered around Black women as stressed throughout this research is critical for a better future.

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