

## **The Psychological Strain of Bias: Exploring the Mental Health Impact of Hair Discrimination**

### **Abstract**

Research has highlighted the significant impact of hair discrimination on the mental health of Black women, establishing a clear link between racial bias and various psychological challenges. This form of discrimination involves unequal treatment based on race, deeply intertwining with identity. The CROWN Act ("Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair") seeks to protect individuals, particularly Black women, from hair discrimination (Donahoo, 2021). A scholarly exploration of existing literature is important to explore how systemic racism perpetuates hair discrimination, highlighting its psychological toll, including anxiety and low self-esteem.

### **Purpose**

Black women often uphold Eurocentric beauty standards, impacting their mental health. Grooming policies, while ostensibly neutral, disproportionately affect them. Research indicates that Black women's hair is perceived as unprofessional 2.5 times more than that of white women (O'Brien-Richardson, 2024). Despite the importance of the CROWN Act in promoting racial equity, limited research exists on its direct mental health impacts. This review identifies gaps and guides future research in legislative and professional domains.

### **Methodological Approach**

This literature review examines hair discrimination's intersection with mental health for Black women. A systematic search of academic databases utilized keywords such as "hair discrimination" and "mental health," adhering to defined criteria. Key studies were reviewed and synthesized into themes reflecting the psychological effects of discrimination and cultural significance. The review aims to enhance understanding of these impacts and advocate for culturally competent mental health practices.

### **Contributions to Social Work**

The social work profession must be vocal about creating safe spaces for Black women through services and in workspaces. Providers and supervisors must recognize the pressures faced by individuals with Afrocentric hairstyles. Additionally, the profession should be committed to preparing culturally competent social workers, supervisors, and practitioners who are committed to eradicating the Grand Challenge for Social Work of racism. This is an ethical responsibility that demands action from all levels of social work practice. Addressing hair discrimination is essential for social justice, as many Black women remain unprotected by such laws (Donahoo, 2021). The psychological toll of navigating these biases underscores the need for comprehensive protections against discrimination.