

Five *on* Friday

Musings on Mental Health

Something Old, Something New

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The ink is barely dry. Just yesterday, President Biden signed legislation establishing [Juneteenth as a US federal holiday](#). Short for June 19th, Juneteenth is tomorrow. Because its debut as a federal holiday falls on Saturday, today was declared a holiday (occasionally government systems move quickly).



[Photo Credit](#)

Following Juneteenth, Sunday is Father's Day - a holiday associated with many traditions. I am especially looking forward to honoring my nearly 89-year-old father and the new fathers in our extended family since it all happened via zoom last year.

1. Father's Day. The origins of this U.S. national holiday date back to 1908 when the country's first event exclusively honoring fathers took place in a church community in West Virginia. The local clergyman gave a sermon dedicated to honoring 362 men killed the previous year in a coal mining explosion. Washington was the

first state to declare [Father's Day](#) an official holiday on June 19, 1910. In 1972, President Richard Nixon signed Father's Day into law as a federal holiday.

2. Fathers and Mental Health. In previous posts, [Seeing the Men in Mental Illness](#) and [Men, Mental Illness and Suicide: Your Questions Answered](#), I have written about men and mental health. The data on fathers and mental health are limited. The gap in research does not mean mental health issues do not exist. Consider, for example, prenatal and postpartum depression. Although rarely discussed, the extant data suggest that [10% of new dads](#) experience paternal postpartum depression. In the first year of parenting, [over 25% of new fathers](#) report experiencing depression - which is almost always undiagnosed and untreated.

3. Juneteenth. Its roots predate Father's Day, but tomorrow is the first time that June 19th will be celebrated as a U.S. national holiday. On June 19th, 1865, African-Americans who were enslaved in Galveston, Texas, learned that they were free. In the century and a half since then, people across the United States evolved a tradition of celebrations commemorating this watershed event. With President Biden's signature on Thursday, Juneteenth became an official U.S. federal holiday.

4. Black Americans and Mental Health. As I described in a previous Five on Friday, [Go Where the People Are](#), the [National Survey of American Life](#) reports that the lifetime prevalence of major depression is lower for Black Americans than for White Americans. However, Black Americans with depression report greater impairment in work, relationships, and social functioning than White Americans with depression. According to the [National Comorbidity Survey](#), although Black Americans had a lower lifetime risk of mood disorder than White Americans, they were more likely to be persistently ill once diagnosed. Black adults in the U.S. are also [more likely](#) than White adults to report persistent symptoms of emotional distress, such as sadness, hopelessness and feeling like everything is an effort.

5. A point of intersection. So what do Juneteenth and Father's Day have in common? Low access to mental health services for the people we are recognizing with these holidays. Black Americans face more barriers to care and estimates indicate that only [one in three](#) Black adults who need mental health care receive it. And despite the need, the data consistently indicate that men are [less likely to seek treatment](#) for mental health conditions than women. The picture for Black men reflects a compounding of these factors, resulting in an even bleaker reality in terms of accessing and utilizing mental health care. Data shows that Black American men are [four times more likely to die by suicide](#) than Black American women.

So, as we welcome Juneteenth as a new federal holiday — one with very old roots — and as we celebrate the longtime national holiday of Father's Day, it strikes me that in both cases, we are recognizing members of our communities whose mental health needs are not being well served by our field. I look forward to future Juneteenths and Father's Days when seeking care is not stigmatized and access to care is real for all. That would be cause for celebration!