

Women's Health Disparities: Uterine Health

- ▶ Abnormal uterine bleeding affects about **1.4 million women** each year in the U.S.¹
- ▶ **6.5 million** women of reproductive age have endometriosis and **26 million** women ages 15 to 50 have uterine fibroids.^{2,3}
- ▶ Uterine fibroids research is consistently underfunded, ranking in the **bottom 50 of over 300** conditions funded by the National Institutes of Health in 2023.⁴



Uterine health refers to a woman's experience encompassing the multiple functions of the uterus, including menstruation, implantation, pregnancy, labor, and the general structural integrity of the female reproductive tract.

Many uterine conditions are characterized by irregular periods, excessive bleeding, pelvic and lower back pain, difficulty with urination, or challenges with pregnancy. They greatly affect the health and quality of life of millions of women in the United States and globally, and can often impact both reproductive health and fertility treatments.

Examples of conditions that affect uterine health and/or function:

- ▶ Abnormal uterine bleeding
- ▶ Adenomyosis
- ▶ Endometriosis
- ▶ Gynecologic cancers (e.g., cervical, endometrial, ovarian, uterine)
- ▶ Heavy menstrual bleeding
- ▶ Infertility
- ▶ Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS)
- ▶ Uterine fibroids
- ▶ Uterine polyps



Disparities

Research has shown significant differences in uterine disease prevalence, symptom severity, treatment, and



health outcomes among women from different racial and ethnic groups. While African American women with uterine diseases tend to experience worse clinical outcomes than their white counterparts, an overall lack of data diversity has resulted in limited understanding about how these conditions impact women from underrepresented groups, particularly Hispanic and Asian populations. Disparities in diagnosis and treatment often result in high rates of unnecessary surgeries and infertility for women living with uterine conditions.⁵ For example, Asian women are 56% less likely and Black women are 66% more likely than white women to receive a hysterectomy for a benign gynecological condition.¹

The complexity of uterine health disparities extends beyond genetic, racial, and ethnic factors and individual behaviors, to include social determinants of health, such as neighborhoods, social contexts, and economic stability. Evidence suggests that incidence, severity of symptoms, and adverse outcomes for uterine conditions are higher among women in rural areas than in urban areas.⁶ More sustained, prioritized, and inclusive research is needed to better understand how all of these determinants of health impact groups of women living with uterine conditions across the United States.

Common Risk Factors for Uterine Diseases

- ▶ Age
- ▶ Environmental toxins
- ▶ Family history
- ▶ Food additive consumption*
- ▶ High blood pressure
- ▶ No history of pregnancy
- ▶ Obesity
- ▶ Race
- ▶ Vitamin D deficiency*

* Specific to uterine fibroids

Uterine Fibroids

Uterine Fibroids are benign (non-cancerous) smooth muscle tumors that develop inside or around the uterus. Fibroid symptoms are often treated using medications, as the only treatments for the disease itself are surgical (to remove individual growths or the entire uterus). Innovations toward minimally invasive gynecologic procedures have been helpful to preserve a patient's future fertility.

- ▶ **70%** of white women and **80%** of Black women ages 35-49 have uterine fibroids.⁷
- ▶ Black women tend to develop larger fibroids and at a younger age.⁵
- ▶ **42 out of 1,000** women are hospitalized annually because of fibroids. African American women have higher rates of hospitalization, myomectomies (surgical removal of fibroids), and hysterectomies (surgical removal of the uterus) compared with white women.⁵
- ▶ African American women are **2-3 times** more likely to have a hysterectomy, despite the availability of options for minimally invasive treatments.⁵

Endometriosis

Endometriosis is a condition in which endometrial-like tissue grows outside the uterus, forming lesions on other tissues throughout the body.

- ▶ **6.5 million women** in the United States and over 190 million women worldwide are estimated to have endometriosis.²
- ▶ Although symptoms can begin as early as adolescence, endometriosis is typically diagnosed in a woman's 30s or 40s 4-11 years after symptom onset.²
- ▶ There is no known cure for endometriosis. Hormone therapy, pain medication, and surgical interventions can provide symptom relief, but these treatments vary in their long-term impacts on the disease itself.
- ▶ Lack of data on diverse populations of women with endometriosis affects the accuracy of the prevalence and treatment data, thus perpetuating disparities in care for women of color.

Economic Impact

Abnormal uterine bleeding results in a direct economic burden of almost **\$1 billion** per year.¹ Estimated annual health care costs due to fibroids are **\$34.4 billion**, and losses in work productivity for fibroids patients are up to **\$17.2 billion**.⁸ Endometriosis costs the United States up to **\$119 billion**, with direct health care costs for patients being \$12,118 per year.² These costs are likely even underestimates due to missed and underdiagnoses, and they do not encompass all uterine health conditions.

Women's Health Equity Initiative

The Society for Women's Health Research Women's Health Equity Initiative aims to raise awareness, educate the public and policymakers, and address longstanding disparities in women's health care access and outcomes. The initiative highlights statistics on disease states, life stages, and issues that disproportionately affect women in the United States and engages communities on solutions to improve health equity for women from diverse races, ethnicities, geographies, ages, and roles throughout society.

- ▶ For more resources about Uterine Health conditions, visit www.swhr.org



Endometriosis



Uterine Fibroids

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