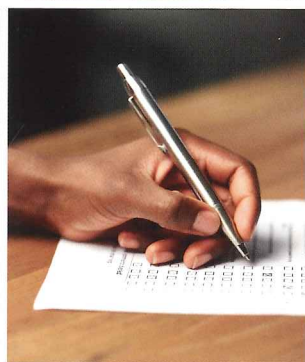
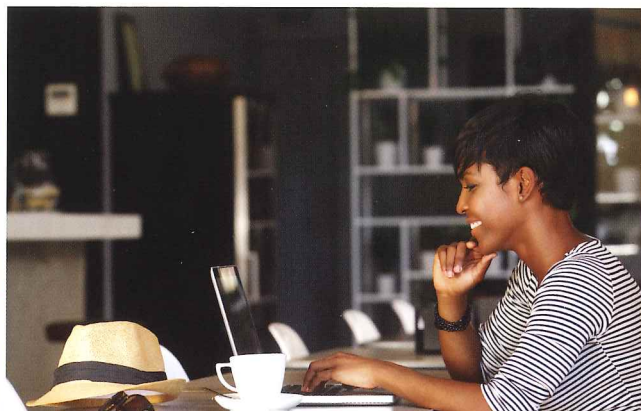




# BLACK WOMEN'S HEALTH STUDY



*Working together  
to improve the health of  
Black women*

#### INSIDE:

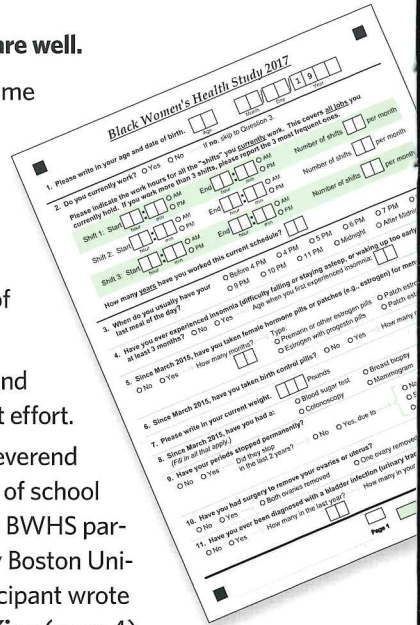
- Going green in the BWHS
- Follow-up to Dr. MLK Jr's 1965 march in Boston
- New BWHS studies
- Stress and health
- Health of Black women in England

[bu.edu/bwhs](http://bu.edu/bwhs)

# WHAT THIS NEWSLETTER IS ABOUT

**Greetings to all. We hope that you and your families are well.**

The BWHS is in its 22nd year (!!) and it is once again time to update health information. **The 2017 health survey** is available on the BWHS website ([www.bu.edu/bwhs](http://www.bu.edu/bwhs)). More than 14,000 participants completed it online before the first mailing of the paper survey. Please complete your survey -- by paper, online, or call us to schedule a telephone interview. Read on to learn about the content of this newsletter.



- The **BWHS is trying to be more "green"** – that is, to use and waste fewer resources. Please see Page 3 for more on that effort.
- The last BWHS newsletter contained a photograph of Reverend Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1965 march in Boston in support of school integration. It was part of a story about the husband of a BWHS participant who was in the photo and was being honored by Boston University for his efforts in civil rights. Another BWHS participant wrote us with a delightful **follow-up about marching with Dr. King** (page 4).
- Dr. Kim Bertrand has started a new project that involves mammograms of BWHS participants. **The BWHS will conduct the first large study of various mammographic measures in predicting breast cancer in Black women** (page 5).
- The BWHS has studied the health effects of various types of stress. In view of high incarceration rates among people of color in the United States, a **new area of concern is the effect of the stress of incarceration of a family member on the health of other family members** (page 6).
- The BWHS was visited by a British scholar who wants to **study the health of women of African descent in England**. She came to learn whether some BWHS research methods may be applicable (page 7).

## CONTACT INFORMATION

Telephone: 1-800-786-0814 or 617-734-6006

Email: [bwhs@bu.edu](mailto:bwhs@bu.edu)

Fax: 617-738-5119

Website: [www.bu.edu/bwhs](http://www.bu.edu/bwhs)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/TheBWHS](https://www.facebook.com/TheBWHS)

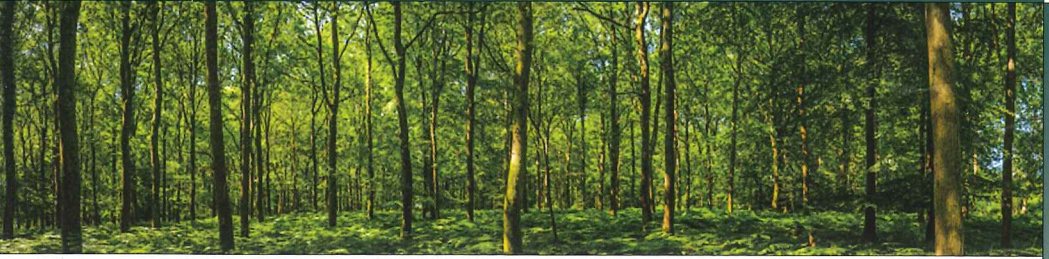
Address: Black Women's Health Study  
Slone Epidemiology Center  
Boston University Medical Campus  
72 East Concord Street, L-7  
Boston, MA 02118



**Boston University** Medical Center  
Slone Epidemiology Center



# GOING GREEN IN THE BWHS

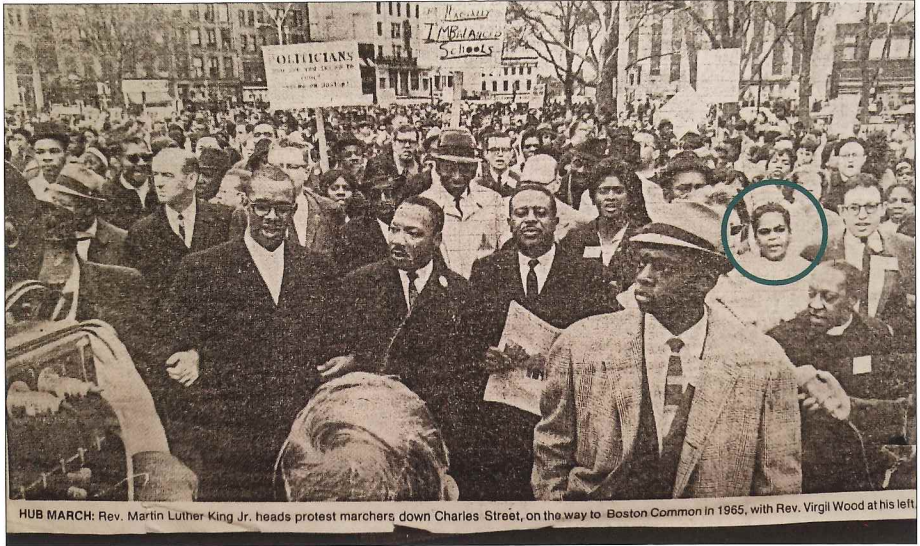


**Health survey online.** The BWHS is trying to be more “green”. We want to contribute to saving the earth by using fewer resources and producing less waste. Going green can save money too. The National Institutes of Health and other funders of health studies like the BWHS are expecting the studies they support to do more with less. How can the BWHS save resources and money? Paperless communication, such as through the internet, can do both. Use of the internet saves the cost of printing surveys and envelopes, mailing costs, and no doubt a number of trees. **In 2003, the first time we made the health survey available online, 4,713 participants used that option to update their health data. In the 2015 follow-up cycle 12 years later, 14,675 women completed the survey online.** The 2017 follow-up cycle is in progress. We have sent an email to every participant for whom we have an email address to invite completion of the 2017 survey online, and over 14,000 have done so thus far. Our procedure is to post the survey online, email all participants for whom we have an email address, wait six weeks, and then mail paper questionnaires to all who have not completed a survey online. The survey is still available on the BWHS website ([www.bu.edu/bwhs](http://www.bu.edu/bwhs)) even if you receive a paper copy of the survey. We hope that the number of women who choose the online option will continue to increase.

## Newsletters online

We have always sent paper newsletters to BWHS participants in the U.S., and emailed international participants a link to the online newsletter. Beginning with our next issue we will offer the online newsletter option to all BWHS participants. **If you would like to receive the online newsletter instead of the paper mailing, visit the BWHS website to subscribe (go to [www.bu.edu/bwhs](http://www.bu.edu/bwhs) and click on the link). You will need your study reference number from the back cover of this newsletter (the 8 digit number on the bottom of the address update card).** One advantage: online newsletters are easy to forward to friends, family, and groups with which you are involved. Remember to add [bwhs@bu.edu](mailto:bwhs@bu.edu) to your contacts list so BWHS emails do not go into your spam folder. Participants who do not subscribe online will receive a paper copy in the mail. Thank you for helping the BWHS go green!

## FOLLOW-UP TO DR. MLK'S MARCH IN BOSTON IN 1965



*Photo credit: Courtesy of Boston Herald*

The last BWHS newsletter included a photograph of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and some of the women and men who marched with him in 1965 in support of school desegregation in Boston. We were thrilled to receive the following note and the newspaper photograph above from BWHS participant Kim Smith, who has given us permission to include her note and clipping in the present newsletter. Kim wrote:

"I am writing because the last newsletter contained a picture of Martin Luther King Jr. during his march in Boston in 1965. I thought it would be interesting to mention that my mother participated in that march in April 1965. Since I was born in October of the same year, I like to say that I was also there with her. Here is the same picture you posted in the Winter 2017 newsletter and my mother (and I) are circled just to the right of Dr. King! My mother is now 87 and resides in Dorchester, MA."

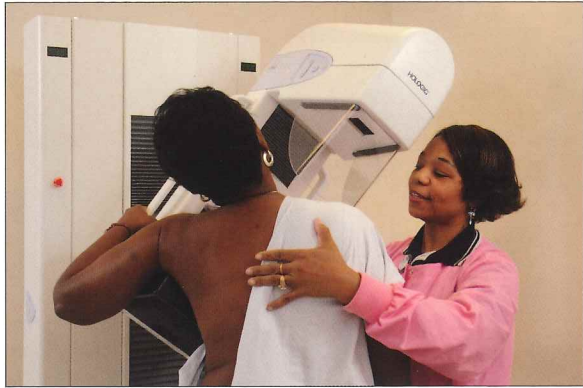
We thank Kim for her note and for upholding the family tradition of participating in activities such as the BWHS that contribute to improving the well-being of Black women.



# NEW BWHS RESEARCH

## **BWHS mammogram study**

Dr. Kim Bertrand, who has been with the BWHS for two years, has just received funding from the National Cancer Institute to conduct a study of mammograms in the BWHS. The goal is to determine whether certain features that can be seen on mammogram images, particularly a feature called mammographic density (MD), are useful predictors of breast cancer



*Photo credit: University of Chicago Medicine, Chicago, IL*

in Black women. Previous studies, mostly in White women, have shown that women with very high MD have a higher risk of developing breast cancer, but whether this is the case for Black women is unknown. On every BWHS health survey, we have asked whether you went for a mammogram in the past two years, and most women ages 40 to 69 have answered yes to getting this breast cancer screening test. BWHS staff will write to some of the women who reported having had a mammogram to ask for the name of the mammography facility they attended and permission to contact the facility for access to the mammogram. BWHS staff will obtain the screening mammograms of 6,700 BWHS participants, including 700 who have reported being diagnosed with breast cancer. An expert who developed the techniques for measuring features on digital mammograms will train BWHS staff to do so. The mammograms will be analyzed by the trained BWHS staff members to estimate MD and other features. Dr. Bertrand will use these data to identify factors that predict high MD, and to assess whether high MD and other mammographic features predict breast cancer incidence in Black women. It will be especially useful to determine whether certain features predict the more aggressive forms of breast cancer (such as triple negative) that occur more often in Black women than in other racial groups.

## **BWHS study of cancer survivors**

Another BWHS investigator, Dr. Traci Bethea, has just been awarded funding from the National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences. She will study factors that may improve survival in women affected by breast cancer in the BWHS. Congratulations to Traci!

## STRESS AND HEALTH

Research has shown that stress during childhood can affect health later in life. Parents play a central role in the lives of their children and the absence of a parent during childhood could affect the child's health later during adulthood. In recent decades, a destructive force operating on American families has especially affected families of color. The number of incarcerated people in the United States (mostly men) increased greatly starting in the 1970's because of the "war on drugs". In 1972, 161 U.S. residents per 100,000 population were incarcerated in prisons or jails. By 2007, the rate had increased more than four-fold to a peak of 767 per 100,000. The incarceration rate in the U.S. is by far the highest in the developed world. There has been a very large racial disparity in incarceration rates, with many more Blacks in prison or jail for nonviolent drug offenses than other racial/ethnic groups. Most of the incarcerated men had been wage earners before the imprisonment. Thus, for many families, economic suffering accompanies the anxiety and stress associated with having a loved one incarcerated. Jacqueline McCleod, who has been a member of the BWHS Advisory Board since the BWHS was in the planning stages, is the Executive Director of a nonprofit group called Healing Communities Network. This group helps individuals cope with returning to society after being released from prison. She suggested that the BWHS collect information on incarceration and loss of a parent during a participant's childhood. Her suggestion resulted in two questions on the 2017 survey—one about absence of a household member due to incarceration in the first 18 years of your life, and one about loss of a mother, father, or guardian due to death or prolonged separation in the first 18 years of your life. We will be able to use the responses to those questions to understand the health effects later in life of these absences and losses on family members.

### The importance of studying the social determinants of health

The social determinants of health are societal factors or conditions which affect health in both negative and positive ways. Studying these factors requires data from people with a range of experience in relation to the societal condition being studied. For example, the BWHS has explored stress, experience of racism, neighborhood characteristics, socio-economic factors (e.g., education, income), and experience of violence in relation to health. The 2017 survey asks

questions on incarceration and loss of parent. This kind of research can provide evidence to support programs that deliver services aimed at reducing inequities in society and for social justice efforts that work to effect institutional and cultural change. It can also provide information on steps that individuals can take to improve their health in the face of these societal challenges. See the publications list on [www.bu.edu/bwhs](http://www.bu.edu/bwhs) for descriptions of BWHS research in these areas.

# HEALTH OF BLACK WOMEN IN ENGLAND

Dr. Jenny Douglas, a professor at The Open University in England, came to Boston in May to spend time with BWHS investigators and staff. She came to explore BWHS methods that may be useful in achieving her goal of starting a study of Black British women. Before World War II, there were few non-white residents, perhaps 20,000, in England. That situation changed after the war, when there was a large influx of individuals of African ancestry from Caribbean countries like Jamaica. Since the 1980s, most of the immigration to England has been from African countries. In 2011, over 1,900,000 British citizens self-identified as Black/African/Caribbean, representing 3% of the population. There are many excellent epidemiologic studies of women's health in Great Britain but none focus on Black women. Dr. Douglas's interest in starting a study of Black women is an opportunity for us to add a new dimension to the BWHS motto – "Working together to improve the health of Black women."

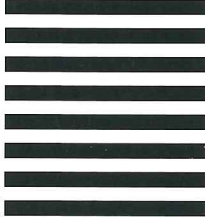


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