



Spotlight

Illinois Public Health Association

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The Straw That Broke Us: Tyler Perry's Latest Film and the Quiet Crisis of Black Mental Health

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Tyler Perry's new film *Straw* doesn't just tell a story – it holds a mirror to the silent struggles in Black households, particularly for single mothers who carry the weight of everyone else's healing while neglecting their own. It's not just a movie; it's a moment. A wake-up call. A reminder that many of us are walking around carrying trauma so normalized, we no longer recognize it as pain.



Picture: Netflix

The protagonist, a Black single mother, breaks – not in a loud, cinematic crash– but in a slow unraveling that too many of us recognize. The unpaid bills, the unspoken grief, the emotionally absent partners, the trauma passed down through silence. For some viewers, *Straw* may be a dramatization. But for countless Black women, it's Tuesday.

The Unseen Weight: Trauma as Normalcy

In many Black communities, resilience is praised while vulnerability is silenced. We wear strength like armor, but what happens when that armor corrodes from the inside? What happens when survival mode becomes a personality? When anxiety looks like “just being strong” and depression sounds like “I'm tired, that's all”?

PTSD in the Black community doesn't always come from war—it comes from living in fight-or-flight for decades. From systemic racism. From raising children while healing from your own childhood. From watching sons die in headlines and daughters shrink in a world that doesn't see their softness. And from generations of silence around mental health.

My Mother Was the Blueprint

When I watched *Straw* I couldn't help but think of my mother.



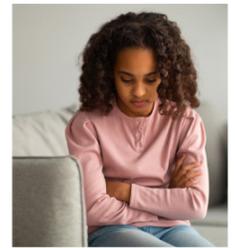
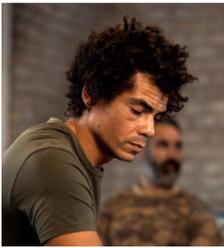
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She made it happen for her three children, no matter the cost to herself. She worked over 16 hours a day, six days a week. Paid tuition out of pocket. Made sure we had not just what we needed—but even what we wanted. She came home and cooked. Cleaned. Held everything together like it was second nature.

She never cried. She never asked for help. She always held her head high.

What kept her grounded was us—her kids. And she used every moment she had to teach us not just how to survive in this world, but how to live in it. Her strength wasn't just in what she did—it was in what she gave.

Her support system—friends, faith, and a small circle of elders—was everything. And sometimes, that's all you need to keep pushing through. But that kind of support is rare now. The village has gotten quiet. People are less likely to help, and it feels like everyone's out for themselves. There aren't any grandparents anymore. Too many kids are raising themselves with screens and silence.



Mental Health is a Community Matter

What *Straw* does so powerfully is ask us to pause and pay attention. It invites a long-overdue conversation: not just about what happened to us, but what we've normalized.

- That anger may be unhealed grief.
- That silence may be dissociation.
- That fatigue might not be physical—it may be depression.
- That “she’s so strong” might be code for “she has no choice.”

The trauma isn't always loud. Sometimes it looks like perfectionism. Or avoidance. Or people-pleasing. Or the inability to sit still with your own thoughts. And if we never name it, we never heal from what continually breaks us.

So Where Do We Go From Here?

We need safe spaces for storytelling, therapy that understands cultural context, and community dialogues that don't shame vulnerability. We need to check in on our strong friends. We need to tell Black single mothers they deserve rest, healing, and joy—not just survival.

Straw reminds us that we must create room for the breaking point—so it doesn't break us.



Because healing isn't weakness. It's the most radical act of love we can offer ourselves and each other.

If this story resonates with you, share it. Reflect on it. Start the conversation in your family, your church, your group chat. Because mental health is not just personal—it's communal.