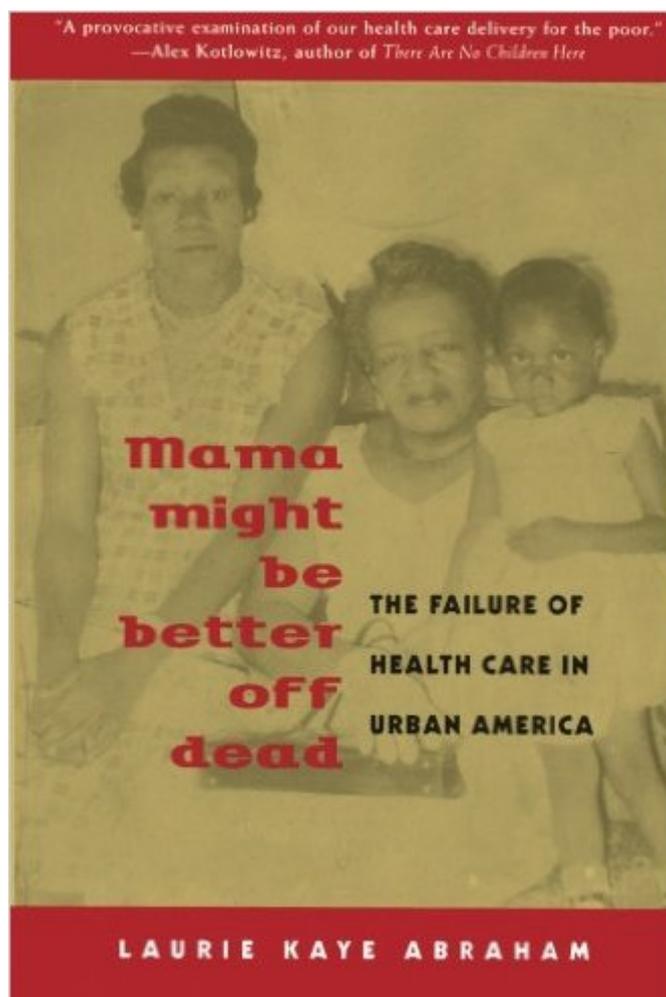


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# Mama Might Be Better Off Dead: The Failure Of Health Care In Urban America



## Synopsis

Mama Might Be Better Off Dead is an unsettling, profound look at the human face of health care. Both disturbing and illuminating, it immerses readers in the lives of four generations of a poor, African-American family beset with the devastating illnesses that are all too common in America's inner-cities. The story takes place in North Lawndale, a neighborhood that lies in the shadows of Chicago's Loop. Although surrounded by some of the city's finest medical facilities, North Lawndale is one of the sickest, most medically underserved communities in the country. Headed by Jackie Banes, who oversees the care of a diabetic grandmother, a husband on kidney dialysis, an ailing father, and three children, the Banes family contends with countless medical crises. From visits to emergency rooms and dialysis units, to trials with home care, to struggles for Medicaid eligibility, Abraham chronicles their access (or lack of access) to medical care. Told sympathetically but without sentimentality, their story reveals an inadequate health care system that is further undermined by the direct and indirect effects of poverty. When people are poor, they become sick easily. When people are sick, their families quickly become poorer. Embedded in the family narrative is a lucid analysis of the gaps, inconsistencies, and inequalities the poor face when they seek health care. This book reveals what health care policies crafted in Washington, D. C. or state capitals look like when they hit the street. It shows how Medicaid and Medicare work and don't work, the Catch-22s of hospital financing in the inner city, the racial politics of organ transplants, the failure of childhood immunization programs, the vexed issues of individual responsibility and institutional paternalism. One observer puts it this way: "Show me the poor woman who finds a way to get everything she's entitled to in the system, and I'll show you a woman who could run General Motors." Abraham deftly weaves these themes together to make a persuasive case for health care reform while unflinchingly presenting the complexities that will make true reform as difficult as it is necessary. *Mama Might Be Better Off Dead* is a book with the power to change the way health care is understood in America. For those seeking to learn what our current system of health care promises and what it delivers, it offers a place for the debate to begin.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

As a graduate student writing my thesis on urban health care issues, I must say this book is a gem! Laurie Kaye Abraham makes the most compelling arguments for health care reform in this book while walking the fine line of objectivity at the same time. Now I know I can truly say that I understand why many urban areas suffer from some of the same public health woes as third-world countries. Thank you, Ms. Abraham for inspiring me and thanks to the Banes family for allowing us into their lives.

The U.S. government would like us to think that we, being the lone superpower in the world today, have all of our own internal problems solved. Not so. There are millions of uninsured and underinsured people (many of them children) in the U.S. who struggle to meet their own basic (and more advanced) health care needs. This is often a foreign world to Americans raised with good health insurance coverage. Yet Abraham shows us that we cannot ignore the health care problems in our own backyard. As a recent college graduate who is entering medical school this fall, I was challenged to think carefully about how I will choose to practice medicine in the coming years. Given what I now know, I feel a responsibility to help change the plight of the uninsured. As a final word, the only reason I gave this book 4 stars instead of 5 is because the personal narratives, while very revealing, get a little long-winded at times. Otherwise, it is a great book, one that I anticipate referencing frequently in the coming years.

I found this book to be a great resource for a description of health care coverage for the lower income bracket individuals and families. It discussed many of the loops that people have to go through in this process and how simply getting to the doctor's office is out of reach without the right resources. This was an insightful albeit incredibly difficult book to read. Health care workers should read this and get a feel for how something that seems very easy to say is almost impossible to

do...this is worth the time and money!

I was required to read this book for a Social Problems Analysis class. Before, I had never thought about the major problems with our health system. Unlike a reviewer before me, I don't see her as being biased. If you have ever lived in a poor urban neighborhood, then you would know, Abraham is correct. People who live in poverty, often have no access to better health care, so they take what they can get. It is easy to say these people should take responsibility for their health care if you have never been in this situation. Abraham did a wonderful job staying objective, even at times, when I don't know if I could have. I would recommend this book to anyone who has questions about how the medical system works in poor areas.

I loved this book. It was so honest and the author did a very good job of helping you get to know the characters as if you were there watching it yourself. Definitely worth the read if you would like to know more about how Welfare, Medicare, and Medicaid really work for poverty level families.

Even though this book appears quite dated at this point - it is remarkable how it might have happened today. This is an influential work detailing the failure of urban health and is a key read for anyone interested in health policy. The history is approachable here and takes place in Chicago. If you purchase this book realize you are purchasing a scholarly book which balances the "story" of how urban health fails in inner cities and limits the characterization of the individuals in the stories. I found Abraham's writing style helpful because it is "neutral" and so many health policy books appear to have an underlying agenda.

really enjoyed reading this book for class! it is eye opening and really shows us how much trouble the poor endure related to health care and it shows that it isn't as easy as we may think with their resources. also shows you how much money is spent fighting fires that could have been fought at much lower costs with preventative care - which they lack access to and education about! great book!

Abraham presents facts and statistics of poor African Americans through the story of four generations in a poor Chicago family as they go through life navigating the health care system. The story is presented from a very fact-based point of view. It includes the trials of Mrs. Jackson, the grandmother; Tommy, the son; Jackie, the caretaker and Tommy's daughter; Robert Banes,

Jackie's husband; and their three children. Abraham presents the trouble deciding which jobs to take and how it will affect the overall family income when many jobs don't provide insurance. Statistics are presented on lack of family education about programs available for programs that would have not added income or taken away assistance they were already receiving. This book took into account the physician's assigned to the case when the patient is admitted without a primary physician, multiple residents and having to explain issues multiple times. Residents and physicians do not always look at the overall picture but the latest issue. Even the lack of physicians discussing do not resuscitate orders with the family when Mrs. Jackson is close to death was brought to light. I would like to ask the author what happened after the grandmother died and Robert received his transplant. How did the loss of SSI change their status and the outcome of their healthcare and financial status? Overall I give this book a 4 (very good). I agree with the authors position and policies set forth to help the poor are not working and need some serious revamping. I only rate it a four because of the tediousness of the information make it a hard to get through. This is a great read for those who want to do public policy dealing with healthcare reform and anyone interested in the plight of the poor having to negotiate the current system.

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