

# Perceived racism may impact black Americans' mental health

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For black American adults, perceived racism may cause mental health symptoms similar to trauma and could lead to some physical health disparities between blacks and other populations in the United States, according to a new study published by the American Psychological Association.

While previous studies have found links between racism and mental health, this is the first meta-analysis on the subject focusing exclusively on black American adults, according to the study published online in *APA's Journal of Counseling Psychology*.

"We focused on black American adults because this is a population that has reported, on average, more incidents of racism than other racial minority groups and because of the potential links between racism and not only mental health, but [physical health](#) as well," said lead author Alex Pieterse, PhD, of the University at Albany, State University of New York.

Researchers examined 66 studies comprising 18,140 black adults in the United States. To be included in the analysis, a study must have been published in a peer-reviewed journal or dissertation between 1996 and 2011; include a specific analysis of mental health indicators associated with racism; and focus specifically on black American adults in the United States.

Black Americans' psychological responses to racism are very similar to

common responses to trauma, such as somatization, which is [psychological distress](#) expressed as physical pain; interpersonal sensitivity; and anxiety, according to the study. Individuals who said they experienced more and very stressful racism were more likely to report [mental distress](#), the authors said.

While the researchers did not collect data on the impacts on physical health, they cite other studies to point out that perceived racism may also affect black Americans' physical health.

"The relationship between perceived racism and self-reported depression and anxiety is quite robust, providing a reminder that experiences of racism may play an important role in the [health disparities](#) phenomenon," Pieterse said. "For example, African-Americans have higher rates of hypertension, a serious condition that has been associated with stress and depression."

The authors recommended that therapists assess racism experiences as part of standard procedure when treating [black Americans](#), and that future studies focus on how discrimination is perceived in specific settings, such as work, online or in school.

**More information:** Full text of the article is available at [www.apa.org/pubs/journals/rel ... cou-of-p-pieterse.pdf](http://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/rel/cou-of-p-pieterse.pdf)

Provided by American Psychological Association

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