

RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IN LATE ADOLESCENCE AND MENTAL HEALTH OUTCOMES

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Background: Racism has negative effects on the mental and physical health of children and adolescents. Unfortunately, research in this field has been limited by the types of studies conducted to date, many of which use cross-sectional data. The purpose of this study was to assess whether racial discrimination experienced at ages 18-21 years of age is associated with increased psychological distress and decreased wellbeing as adolescents transition into adulthood. We hypothesized that those who experienced racial discrimination would have higher psychological distress and lower levels of wellbeing compared to those who did not.

Materials/Methods: We performed a secondary analyses of data from the Transition into Adulthood Supplement of the Panel Study of Income Dynamics, a national longitudinal household survey. Our primary exposure of interest was racial discrimination experienced at baseline when participants were ages 18-21 and was measured by the Everyday Discrimination Scale. With regard to outcomes of interest, the Kessler 6 and Mental Health Continuum Short Form were used to measure mental health outcomes of psychological distress and psychological, social, and emotional wellbeing respectively. Generalized linear mixed effects modeling was used to model health outcomes over the 10 years following the exposure to racial discrimination at baseline.

Results: At baseline, those who experienced racial discrimination had significantly higher psychological distress and significantly lower levels of wellbeing compared to those who did not. After controlling for these baseline differences, as well a variety of other potential confounding variables, preliminary results suggest that those who experienced racial discrimination at baseline had higher psychological distress and lower levels of wellbeing in the years that followed compared to those who did not.

Conclusions: Our final results may not only reveal the extent to which exposure to racial discrimination in late adolescence is associated with poor mental health outcomes, but may also demonstrate that these effects persist years after the initial exposure. This study is innovative because it uses prospective longitudinal data to evaluate these effects over time and has important implications for clinical and community-based interventions addressing the need for mental health support that is critical for adolescents who experience racial discrimination.

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