

Discrimination May Accelerate Aging in Black Women

Repeatedly recalling a racist experience can affect parts of the brain associated with aging.

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Racial discrimination may accelerate aging in Black women and increase their risk for heart disease and diabetes, according to a study [published in JAMA Network Open](#).

About [40% of Black adults](#) reported experiencing at least one act of [discrimination](#) in the last year. Discrimination—whether overt or subtle—can be a significant source of stress for individuals.

Study coauthor Negar Fani, PhD, an associate professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at the Emory University School of Medicine, told [Everyday Health](#) that the study's findings highlight the negative impact of racial discrimination on health.

“We were able to show there’s increased engagement in a brain network associated with rumination in relation to racism, and it has a link to accelerated aging,” Fani said. “This helps us better understand the link between why racial discrimination is so frequently associated with more health problems.”

Rumination, or thinking about an event repeatedly, is natural, Fani says, but overanalyzing can also wear down the brain over time.

For the study, researchers recruited 90 Black women who were 38 years old on average to analyze how racism impacts different areas of the brain. After assessing participants for racial discrimination, trauma and posttraumatic stress disorder, researchers collected brain activity information via MRI and used blood samples to determine information on aging.

The analysis showed an association between discrimination and accelerated aging caused by prolonged rumination, which could negatively impact other parts of the body, according to

researchers.

“We’re meant to age at a particular rate, and when we accelerate that rate of aging, we’re more likely to experience diseases associated with aging—including diabetes, heart disease, strokes and dementia—earlier in life,” Fani said.

The findings may help explain why Black Americans have higher rates of these conditions. For example, Black Americans are about twice as likely to develop dementia and Alzheimer’s disease compared with white adults, according to the [Alzheimer’s Association](#).

Researchers emphasize the need for racism to be assessed in primary care settings.

“Just like we screen for factors such as family history or psychiatric issues like depression, I think screening for the experiences of racism could be an important tool in identifying people at risk for certain health conditions,” Fani said.

In a [different study](#), experts found that better heart health in Black women may result in less cognitive decline compared to women with poorer heart health. The study highlights the importance of heart health in supporting cognitive function.

To read more, click [#Racism](#) or [#Brain](#). There, you’ll find headlines such as “[Discrimination May Lead to Unhealthy Gut-Brain Changes](#),” “[Wendy Williams Diagnosed With Dementia](#)” and “[Discrimination Linked to Early Signs of Alzheimer’s Disease](#).”