Older Women of Color Face Higher Disability Rates

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If you're an African-American woman pushing past 50, the aches and pains that come with aging may very well predict future health problems. Black women develop disabilities earlier than their same-aged female and male counterparts, according to a new study published in *Social Science and Medicine* and reported in a Case Western Reserve University statement.

For the National Institutes of Health–funded study, researchers from Cleveland University examined self-reported information from the U.S. Health and Retirement Study of more than 8,701 older black, white and Mexican-American men and women, ages 53 to 75. Participants answered survey questions about their mobility, strength and physical limitations every two years from 1994 to 2006. Scientists also asked participants for information about early life experiences, socioeconomic and marital status and health-related behaviors to assess how these other factors might affect their disabilities.

Findings showed that African-American women reported a higher rate of disabilities in their mid-50s and 60s than their peers. After the mid-60s, the rate at which black women experienced disabilities dropped, then leveled off at about age 75. (Mexican-American women's disability rates followed an inverse trend—early reports of disabilities were not as frequent, but by age 75 these women reported nearly five disabling limitations—twice as many as white men.)

Researchers were unable to explain why African-American women developed physical limitations faster than other gender and racial groups, said David Warner, PhD, an assistant professor of sociology at the university.

Scientists added that future studies are needed to address the unique health experiences of older black women as well as to develop ways to prevent functional health disparities related to race and gender.

Did you know that minorities are less likely to be aware they have diabetes and hypertension? Click here to read more.

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