A Positive Racial Identity May Improve Black Teens' Mental Health

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Many adolescents who belong to ethnic minority groups grapple with self-esteem issues and face social stigma. But a sense of ethnic pride might boost these young people's mental health, according to a study published in the journal Child Development.

For the study, researchers at Northwestern University, Loyola University Chicago and Walden University studied more than 250 urban African-American youths from low-income families. Scientists found that when black teens' ethnic pride increased between seventh and eighth grades, their mental health also improved. Findings also offer promise for African-American teens with low self-esteem: Possessing ethnic pride shielded them from certain mental health problems.

In addition, researchers found that racial identity was a stronger buffer against symptoms of depression for boys than for girls.

The findings implied that ethnic pride may be as important as self-esteem to the mental health of African-American adolescents. "Parents, schools and therapists should expose young people to materials and environments that help cultivate a sense of ethnic pride," said Jelani Mandara, PhD, an associate professor of human development and social policy at Northwestern University and the study's lead author.

For more information about other health concerns facing African-American youth, click here.

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