

Racial Stressors May Cause Premature Brain Aging in Blacks

Researchers saw higher rates of cognitive decline in Black adults earlier in life.

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A new study adds to existing evidence that the [brains](#) of Black adults age more quickly than those of people of other races.

For the study, published in [JAMA Neurology](#), researchers analyzed the MRI scans of about 1,500 racially and ethnically diverse participants. They found that, on average, Black adults in their mid-50s, were more likely than white or Latino adults the same age to have a higher prevalence of white matter lesions on their brains. These lesions are markers of cerebrovascular disease and are associated with cognitive decline and [Alzheimer's disease](#), which affects more than 6 million Americans.

The findings support previous research suggesting that Black people are twice as likely as white people to develop Alzheimer's. The study not only underscores that vascular disease may be particularly harmful to the brains of Black people but also that the damage may begin affecting the brain earlier in life.

Adam Brickman, PhD, senior author of the study and professor of neuropsychology at Columbia University, said he and his team of researchers aimed to determine the moment at which these racial disparities within the brain begin to emerge.

"It's evidence that when we think about outcomes in late life, a lot of those changes are starting earlier in life," Brickman said in a [STAT news release](#). "Cognitive aging is a lifelong phenomenon, not just something that happens when you turn 65."

Researchers believe the early brain aging in Black adults is a function of the phenomenon known as "weathering," which refers to the accumulation of racial stressors, such as residential [segregation](#), [discrimination](#), [poverty](#), [pollution](#) and [anxiety](#) regarding personal safety. Weathering has previously been linked to negative health outcomes, including depression, hypertension, migraines and higher infant and maternal mortality.

Andrea Gilmore-Bykovskiy, PhD, an Alzheimer's researcher and associate professor of emergency medicine at the University of Wisconsin who was not involved with the study, called the study an

“exemplar” and said it provides further evidence that health care providers should strive to address the vascular causes of dementia, such as high blood pressure and diabetes.

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