

Black young adults hospitalized for stroke at much higher rate than whites, Hispanics

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In Florida, black young adults are hospitalized for stroke at a rate three times higher than their white and Hispanic peers, a new study by University of South Florida researchers reports. The study was presented today at the American Heart Association's Council on Epidemiology and Prevention Annual Conference and appears in the online version of the international journal *Neuroepidemiology*.

Disparities in [stroke](#) outcomes between black and white patients have been widely reported for years. While overall death rates for stroke are down, blacks bear a disproportionate burden of disease, disability and death from strokes, said lead author Elizabeth Barnett Pathak, PhD, associate professor of epidemiology at the USF College of Public Health.

"Our study shows this black-white disparity hasn't improved. In fact, it's clear that the gap emerges even at relatively young ages - among adults hospitalized for strokes in their 20s and 30s - and widens with increasing age," Dr. Pathak said. "It points toward an urgent need for primary prevention of [hypertension](#), obesity, and other [stroke risk factors](#) among African Americans to eliminate disparities in stroke."

While most strokes occur among the elderly, stroke in [young adults](#) can lead to chronic illness and disability that places a terrible burden on the victims and their families, said Michael Sloan, MD, professor of neurology and director of the USF Stroke Program at Tampa General Hospital. "If the stroke is severe it can be very debilitating, impacting the

ability of young people to work and raise their families."

And even in young adults strokes can be fatal. The Florida study found 8 to 10 percent of [stroke patients](#) died before discharge from the hospital.

The USF researchers examined more than 16,000 stroke cases of young adults hospitalized for stroke in Florida from 2001 through 2006. The study included men and women, ages 25 to 49, from the three largest ethnic groups in Florida: whites, blacks and Hispanics. Among the findings:

- The age-adjusted stroke hospitalization rate for blacks was three times higher than for whites or Hispanics. Stroke hospitalization rates for Hispanics were similar to those for whites.
- The rates at which hospitalized stroke patients died were 15 percent higher for blacks than whites, but this disparity was explained by a greater prevalence of stroke risk factors and complicating illnesses such as diabetes, coronary artery disease and heart failure.
- In contrast, Hispanic stroke patients were 27 percent less likely to die in the hospital than whites after taking risk factors and other illnesses into account. More studies are needed to determine whether Hispanic ethnicity actually confers any sort of protective advantage, the researchers said.
- Black stroke patients were more likely than whites and Hispanics to have been diagnosed with high blood pressure, morbid obesity or drug abuse. White stroke patients were more likely to have been diagnosed with high cholesterol, alcohol abuse or cigarette smoking.
- The majority of black stroke patients (56 percent) were women, while the majority of Hispanic and white patients were men.

- Hispanics were more likely than blacks and whites to suffer a hemorrhagic stroke, triggered by the rupture of a blood vessel in the brain. As with the elderly, the most common type of stroke in younger adults, known as ischemic stroke, was caused by the obstruction of blood flow to the brain.

While the USF study did not find an increase (or decrease) in young adults hospitalized for stroke in Florida, Dr. Sloan is concerned that tough economic times may lead to rise in strokes and other cardiovascular incidents. "When people stop taking their blood pressure pills and other medications because they can no longer afford it, they have strokes and heart attacks," he said.

Source: University of South Florida Health

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