

Discrimination takes its toll on Black women

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Racial discrimination is a major threat to African American women's mental health. It undermines their view of themselves as masters of their own life circumstances and makes them less psychologically resilient and more prone to depression. These findings by Dr. Verna Keith, from Florida State University in the US and her colleagues, are published online in Springer's journal *Sex Roles*.

Dr. Keith and her team used data from the National Survey of American Life: Coping with Stress in the 21st Century to analyze the relationship between perceived [discrimination](#) and [depressive symptoms](#) among 2,300 African American adult [women](#). They also looked at whether personal mastery - the belief that one can control important circumstances affecting one's life - explained the intensity of the women's psychological response to discrimination, and whether experiences of discrimination differed by skin complexion. The effects of age and education were also assessed.

African American women who viewed themselves as being able to exercise some control over their life circumstances reported fewer depressive symptoms. Women who were subjected to higher levels of unfair treatment experienced more depressive symptoms, in part, because day-to-day discrimination undermined their overall confidence in their ability to manage life challenges, leaving them feeling powerless and depressed.

The authors' analyses also showed that skin tone was not linked to level of discrimination, mastery or depressive symptoms. Older African

American women reported slightly fewer experiences of discrimination, lower levels of mastery and fewer depressive symptoms than younger women. The more educated women felt more in control of their lives and experienced fewer depressive symptoms.

The authors conclude: "Our results show that perceptions of unfair treatment, like other chronic stressors, are psychologically burdensome to African American women. Our findings confirm that mastery mediates the relationship between discrimination and depressive symptoms and plays a major role in explaining why some African American women are more vulnerable to discrimination than others. Many women suffer emotionally because they are unable to view themselves as efficacious and competent actors when treated with suspicion and confronted with dehumanizing interactions."

More information: Keith VM et al (2009). Discriminatory experiences and depressive symptoms among African American women: do skin tone and mastery matter? *Sex Roles*; [DOI 10.1007/s11199-009-9706-5](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-009-9706-5)

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