Stereotyping has a lasting negative impact

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Aggression. Over-eating. Inability to focus. Difficulty making rational decisions. New research out of the University of Toronto Scarborough shows prejudice has a lasting negative impact on those who experience it.

"Past studies have shown that people perform poorly in situations where they feel they are being stereotyped," says Associate Professor of Psychology Michael Inzlicht, who led the study, published in this month's edition of the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. "What we wanted to do was look at what happens afterwards. Are there lingering effects of prejudice? Does being stereotyped have an impact beyond the moment when stereotyping happens?"

In order to determine whether negative stereotyping in a particular situation had lasting effects, Inzlicht's team performed a series of tests. First, they placed participants in situations where they had to perform a task in the face of negative stereotyping. After the participants were removed from the prejudicial situation, researchers measured their ability to control their aggression, eat appropriate amounts, make rational decisions, and stay focused.

Their results show that prejudice and stereotyping have lingering adverse impacts.

"Even after a person leaves a situation where they faced negative stereotypes, the effects of coping with that situation remain," says Inzlicht. "People are more likely to be aggressive after they've faced

prejudice in a given situation. They are more likely to exhibit a lack of self control. They have trouble making good, rational decisions. And they are more likely to over-indulge on unhealthy foods."

In one portion of the study, researchers had a group of women write a math test. They told the women this test would determine whether or not they were capable and smart in math, subtly injecting stereotypes about women and math skills "into the air," says Inzlicht. A separate group of women wrote the same test, except this group was given support and coping strategies to deal with the stress they'd face when writing the test.

After completing the math test, the two groups performed another series of tasks designed to gauge their aggression levels, their ability to focus and to exercise self control.

"In these follow-up tests, the women who felt discriminated against ate more than their peers in the control group. They showed more hostility than the control group. And they performed more poorly on tests that measured their cognitive skills," says Inzlicht.

The pattern remained the same, regardless of the test groups. People who felt they were discriminated against - whether based on gender, age, race or religion - all experienced significant impacts even after they were removed from the situation, says Inzlicht.

"These lingering effects hurt people in a very real way, leaving them at a disadvantage," says Inzlicht. "Even many steps removed from a prejudicial situation, people are carrying around this baggage that negatively impacts their lives."

Provided by University of Toronto