

Multiple sclerosis more linked to depression in minorities

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Multiple sclerosis (MS) can cause significant physical impairment, including fatigue, pain, muscle spasms, tremors and dizziness. For many with MS, the disease wreaks havoc with emotional well being, too, and according to a new study, minorities might especially be at risk for developing depressive symptoms.

Of study participants with the [neurological condition](#), 44.2 percent of [Latinos](#) and 45.8 percent of African-Americans reported at least mild

depression, compared with 38.7 percent of whites with MS. However, more Latinos never received [mental health care](#), compared to whites or African-Americans with MS, according to lead study author Robert Buchanan, Ph.D.

Buchanan is a professor in the department of political science and public administration at Mississippi State University. For the study in the December 2010 issue of the journal *Ethnicity & Disease*, authors used data from a registry of 26,967 white, 715 Latino and 1,313 African-American MS patients.

“Depression is even more common in people with MS,” said Staley Brod, M.D., director of the Multiple Sclerosis Research Group Clinic at the University of Texas-Houston. “In general it is a treatable problem and, in most cases, the neurologist that’s seeing the patient can deal with it effectively,” he said.

However, compared to African-Americans and whites, Latinos were significantly less likely to get mental health services, obtain medical care from a specialist or receive occupational therapy or home health care assistance.

“A surprising finding to me is that despite these inequities in mental health, rehabilitation and other medical subspecialties, there’s no disparity in treatment,” Brod said. Similar percentages of whites, Latinos and African-Americans received [multiple sclerosis](#) therapies, called disease-modifying therapies, which treat flares and prevent symptoms.

In terms of functioning and disability levels, Latinos with MS fared better than other ethnic groups, the study reported. More Latinos reported normal function for mobility, bladder and bowel function and vision, compared to whites and African-Americans.

Buchanan said that because the study results rely on the responses of voluntary participants, not a random data sample, the applicability of the findings to the larger MS population might be limited.

More information: Buchanan, RJ, et al. Comparisons of Latinos, African Americans, and Caucasians with multiple sclerosis. *Ethnicity Dis* 20(4), 2010.

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