

Black men at both ends of economic spectrum at risk for depression

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Jobless African-American men might be at a greater risk of suffering from depression, new research shows. More surprising, at the other end of the income spectrum, African-American men making \$80,000 and upward are also among those at higher risk.

For women, the picture is different: those in the \$45,000 to \$79,999 income bracket are less likely to report symptoms of depression compared to women with the least income, according to the results of a

national survey of [mental disorders](#) among African-Americans.

Darrell Hudson, Ph.D., and colleagues analyzed data from the National Survey of American Life to determine how factors related to social class like income, education, wealth, employment status, mother's education and marital status relate to depression.

“After measuring depression in a very comprehensive way, the results were not very consistent. We need to figure out as a general public: Is there a cost associated with socioeconomic position or moving in an upward trajectory?” said Hudson, at the Center on Social Disparities in Health at the University of San Francisco.

In all, researchers assessed the nationally representative sample of 3,570 African American [men](#) and women for depressive episodes that occurred within the past year and over their lifetimes. The study appears online in the journal *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*.

African-American men who made \$80,000 were more apt to report symptoms of depression in the last year compared to African-American men making \$17,000 or less. Unemployed African-American men were more liable to report depression in the last year and over their lifetime compared to employed African-American men. African-American men who completed some college or beyond were less likely to suffer from depression in the last year compared to those who did not complete high school.

“One thing could be going on with African-American men with greater incomes: the more likely they are to work in integrated settings, the more likely to be exposed to racial discrimination,” Hudson said. “Racial discrimination can undermine some of the positive effects of socioeconomic position like the increased benefits of health and feeling better.”

“African-Americans with greater socioeconomic resources are farther away from their social support network, both physically and socially,” Hudson said.

African-American men with high incomes tend to be “riding solo,” said Earlise Ward, Ph.D.

“They might have to worry about tokenism, the lack of African-American role models, social isolation from peers who make less money, and pressure from family and friends to provide for them.”

“When all these things come together, you have the perfect storm for depression with African-American men making over \$80,000,” said Ward, a psychologist and assistant professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Nursing. She had no affiliation with the new study.

Single African-American men were more apt to be depressed than married African-American men both in the short and long term.

“It is clear. Marriage is protective for men suffering from depression,” Ward said.

Not so for women, however.

“Women have a number of roles not only within the home, but outside the home. They have work-related stressors that they experience. Then they come home and are wives and mothers. They might also have additional caregiving responsibilities, such as caring for aging parents or their extended family,” Ward said.

For women, education, wealth and parental education were not associated with depression.

Ward said she could apply this research in the clinical setting: “In therapy with an African-American male in a high income category and either single or divorced, after knowing this research, I may spend time focusing on intimate relationships because this research shows that this may be protective.”

Contrarily, if Ward is working with a woman client, she might ask about her workweek and responsibilities at home as a wife and mother.

Today, the need is stronger than ever for both prevention and intervention programs to reduce risk and treat depression, Ward said.

“African-American men are particularly vulnerable to unemployment, particularly those who suffer from [depression](#). These data were collected from 2001 to 2003. If we used data collected in 2007 to 2009, it could be worse for African-American men,” Hudson said.

More information: Hudson DL, et al. The relationship between socioeconomic position and depression among a U.S. nationally representative sample of African Americans. *Soc Psych Psychiatr Epidemiol* [DOI: 10.1007/s00127-011-0348-x](https://doi.org/10.1007/s00127-011-0348-x)

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