

# African-American men who feel 'in control' are less likely to experience depressive symptoms

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A new University of Michigan study found that African American men between the ages of 35 and 54 who experience discrimination also suffer from significant levels of depressive symptoms.

Study participants were asked about daily discrimination within the past year. Responses included "people act as if they think you are dishonest" and "you are followed around in stores." But when African American men of all ages feel in control over their lives, it protects them from [depressive symptoms](#), the study indicated.

A sense of control over one's life, also referred to as "perceived mastery," facilitates positive mental health. Items such as "sometimes I feel that I'm being pushed around in life" or "I can do just about anything I really set my mind to" evoke responses ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree."

Regardless of life stage, a sense of mastery is an important predictor of positive mental health for African American men, said the researchers, who include Daphne Watkins, U-M assistant professor of social work; Darrell Hudson, postdoctoral fellow at the University of California, San Francisco; Cleopatra Howard Caldwell, U-M associate professor of public health; Kristine Siefert, U-M professor of [social work](#); and James Jackson, director of the U-M Institute for Social Research.

There is more [inequality](#) of income and [economic opportunities](#), which leads to increased exposure to racism and discrimination, the researchers say. These factors, as well as individuals feeling like they have less control of their lives, can take a toll on the mental health of African American men.

The new study examined discrimination, control over one's life, and how these factors influence depressive symptoms for African American men. Researchers analyzed data from 1,271 African American men across three [age groups](#): 18 to 34, 35 to 54, and 55 and older.

Men 55 and older reported less discrimination, less control over their lives and fewer depressive symptoms than men in the other groups. This finding, the researchers say, could suggest that although older African American men experience fewer bouts of discrimination and depressive symptoms, they are unable to reap the benefits of perceived control over their environments that their younger counterparts experience.

According to the study, when [African American men](#) reach middle adulthood, they are more likely to encounter discrimination or unpleasant encounters in the workplace and social settings, which threatens their mental well-being.

In addition, there were generational differences among respondents. Depressive symptoms and experiences of young adult men who grew up during the 1980s and 1990s would naturally vary compared to men who grew up decades earlier in the 1950s and during the Jim Crow era.

**More information:** The findings appear in the current issue of *Research on Social Work Practice*: [rsw.sagepub.com](http://rsw.sagepub.com).

Provided by University of Michigan

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