

Discrimination, alcohol and tobacco linked to panic attacks in minorities

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A new study has identified discrimination, alcohol and tobacco as significant predictors of minority Americans' experiencing panic attacks—fearful spells with psychological symptoms that last a few minutes and are often debilitating and disruptive.

Researchers from the University of Alabama at Birmingham schools of Public Health and Health Professions, Department of Pediatric Emergency Medicine, and Sparkman Center for Global Health studied demographic and socioeconomic variables in relation to panic attacks among African-Americans, Afro-Caribbeans, Hispanics and Asians.

"Although there is a body of research on the harmful effects of negative altercations on mental health, knowledge gaps persist around immigrant [health](#)," said Assistant Professor Henna Budhwani, Ph.D., director of Undergraduate Education in the Department of Health Care Organization and Policy. "Immigrants, particularly those who are undocumented, are often resistant to speak to researchers for fear of deportation or police engagement. Furthermore, some may not speak English fluently, making communication difficult."

Racial and ethnic minorities and women who encounter discriminatory sentiments and actions are more likely to experience panic attacks. When minority Americans are treated as dishonest or less smart or are disrespected, threatened or called names, they are more likely to meet the criteria of having a panic attack.

The study also found that minority Americans are more likely to experience [panic attacks](#) when they smoke or consume excessive amounts of alcohol. In the study, those who abused alcohol are two times more likely to have a panic attack. Smokers have a 52 percent higher chance than nonsmokers of having a panic attack.

Budhwani was joined in the research by Kristine Ria Herald, Ph.D., assistant professor in the School of Health Professions, and Pediatric Emergency Medicine Research Associate Daniel Chavez-Yenter.

"We hope our work not only enhances the existing academic literature, but also is translated into [public health](#) practice through interventions,

which aim to assist to improve the well-being of racial and ethnic minorities," Budhwani said.

Provided by University of Alabama at Birmingham

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