

Stubborn inequities in heart health persist for some African Americans in the South

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Though mortality from heart disease is decreasing, some groups are at increased risk for developing heart disease, including African Americans in the southeastern U.S. Nearly 44 percent of all African American men, and 48 percent of African American women have some form of cardiovascular disease, including heart disease or stroke.

To encourage heart disease prevention for all Americans, the American Heart Association developed metrics for "ideal cardiovascular health," to guide the public on healthy behaviors to adopt, and health markers to target.

However, research has not fully shown how African Americans in the south might benefit from having ideal cardiovascular health metrics, or the degree to which these health metrics might reduce the chance of getting heart disease.

Researchers from the Brigham and Women's Hospital examined data on ideal cardiovascular health in over 4,700 participants of the Jackson Heart Study in Jackson, Mississippi, one of the largest studies of heart health among African Americans in the U.S. Their results are published online in the *American Journal of Preventative Medicine* on August 15.

The researchers found that having more healthy metrics was related to much lower risks for having a heart attack or stroke—up to 71 percent lower risk for those with the most heart healthy metrics compared to the least.

However, having healthy heart metrics, such as nutrition and physical activity was rare—only 17 percent had at least four markers of heart health.

"Given all that is known about preventing heart disease, it is critical that public health communities work with local communities to support efforts to improve heart health," said public health researcher Mark Ommerborn, lead author of the study.

"I think we are looking at an inequity here," said Cheryl Clark MD, ScD, senior author of the study. "Differences that have persisted this long in light of what we know about heart disease prevention, likely reflect a larger social context that shapes [heart disease](#) risk for some African Americans."

More information: *American Journal of Preventative Medicine* , [DOI: 10.1016/j.amepre.2016.07.003](#)

Provided by Brigham and Women's Hospital

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