

Blacks, women don't get same health benefit from employment

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Being gainfully employed normally is considered good for health, but new research from the University of Michigan shows that black men, and black and white women don't get the same benefits of increased life expectancy related to employment as white men. Neither do people with lower education.

The research led by Shervin Assari, research investigator in the School of Public Health and Medical School, shows how race, gender and education intersect to impact [life expectancy](#), with highly educated, employed [white men](#) living the longest when all other factors impacting health are considered.

"In [public health](#), we consider social determinants of health as fundamental causes of health and illness, and we simply assume they are universally protective for all groups. Our findings show that this is not the case, and your group membership exacerbates or minimizes how you can benefit from access to resources," he said.

"One of the main mechanisms for the effect of employment on health is income, and if you are employed but you cannot make much money from your job, you will not gain a lot health from it."

In the study reported in the Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities, Assari used data from the Americans' Changing Lives study, which followed 2025 whites and 1156 blacks from 1986 to 2011.

He recorded mortality due to any cause from death records and compared it with information from the study, taking into account: age; [health behaviors](#), such as smoking, drinking, and exercise; [physical health](#), including obesity, chronic disease, function, and self-rated health; and mental health such as depressive symptoms.

In addition to disparities due to race and gender, groups with low education also gained minimally from being employed.

These findings are in line with previous research by Assari and colleagues that has shown education better serves whites than blacks when it comes to matters of health.

Previous research by others has shown employment, education and income all have positively impacted a wide range of health outcomes, with studies suggesting having a job may add 10 years to a person's life. In the reverse, past research has attributed unemployment to a 63 percent increase in mortality risk.

Assari said it's not as simple as having a job.

"I don't think this has a behavioral explanation. I do not believe that blacks and women gain less health from their employment because they do not know how to work hard enough. Instead, I think it is how the society is structured. The labor market prefers white men, better employs white men, pays white men more, and promotes white men faster. This is why most CEOs are white men," Assari said.

Merely equalizing access to employment and other resources would not close the health disparities gap, he said, as blacks face more structural difficulties.

"The same is true for mood, self-efficacy, perceived control over life,

and neighborhood safety. Blacks face more difficulty translating economic resources and psychological assets to [health](#) gain," Assari said.

More information: Shervin Assari. Life Expectancy Gain Due to Employment Status Depends on Race, Gender, Education, and Their Intersections, *Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities* (2017). DOI: [10.1007/s40615-017-0381-x](https://doi.org/10.1007/s40615-017-0381-x)

Provided by University of Michigan

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