

Study finds little progress in addressing racial disparities for dementia risk

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While rates of dementia for the U.S. population have been relatively stable or in decline since 2000, rates for Black Americans remain disproportionately high, according to a new study published in *JAMA Neurology*.

Melinda C. Power, ScD, director of the George Washington University Institute for Brain Health and Dementia, and her colleagues used data from an ongoing nationally representative study of adults aged 50 and older to study time trends in [racial disparities](#) in dementia, a general term for conditions that cause memory loss or problems with thinking. The research team looked at multiple waves of data from 2000 through 2016, finding that relative racial disparities in [dementia risk](#) had not changed over this period.

"Blacks have a risk of dementia that is over 50% higher than the risk in whites, and our study found no evidence to suggest the magnitude of this disparity was diminishing over time," said Power, who is also an associate professor of epidemiology at the GW Milken Institute School of Public Health. "We will never achieve racial parity without reducing relative disparities in dementia risk. Additional studies are needed to understand what's causing the high rates of dementia in Blacks, and how to best to reduce rates in this group."

Scientists have identified many potential risk factors for dementia. "All Americans can work to promote [brain health](#) by focusing on factors they can control, such as keeping their [blood pressure](#) in check and getting enough physical activity," Power said. "However, this study highlights the need to find out more about racial disparities in dementia risk on the individual and societal level, so that interventions to reduce disparities can be deployed," she said.

More information: Melinda C. Power et al. Trends in Relative Incidence and Prevalence of Dementia Across Non-Hispanic Black and White Individuals in the United States, 2000-2016, *JAMA Neurology* (2020). [DOI: 10.1001/jamaneurol.2020.4471](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamaneurol.2020.4471)

Provided by George Washington University

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