

Racism linked to poor health among Indigenous Australians

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ANU Associate Professor Raymond Lovett. Credit: Australian National University

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults who have experienced discrimination have poorer health and wellbeing outcomes regardless of their age, where they live and their gender, according to a new national study.

It's the first national study outlining the experiences of racism and [health outcomes](#) among Indigenous Australians.

Researchers from The Australian National University (ANU) analyzed data from more than 8,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults from the national Indigenous-led Mayi Kuwayu Study, collected between 2018-2020.

"These results highlight the breadth and extent of just how bad racism is for our mob's wellbeing," ANU Associate Professor Raymond Lovett said.

"Across the board, we found consistent links between racism and poor mental health, physical health and cultural wellbeing.

"Experiencing discrimination is linked to negative outcomes ranging from low happiness to heart disease."

Discrimination was linked to all negative outcomes examined in the study. These included, but are not limited to, pain, poor life satisfaction, psychological distress, anxiety, depression, heart disease, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and diabetes.

"We found these negative outcomes were increasingly common as the extent of discrimination increased," lead author Dr. Katherine Thurber, from ANU, said.

"Discrimination experiences were pervasive, with almost six in 10 participants in the study reporting having experienced discrimination in their everyday life."

Four out of 10 participants felt they were treated with less respect than other people, and the same proportion reported that "people act like I am

not smart," according to the findings.

The study also found around one in six participants reported they were unfairly bothered by police.

"Any experience of unfair police treatment can have extreme consequences for life opportunities," co-author ANU Ph.D. candidate and Research Associate Ms Roxanne Jones said.

Discrimination was more commonly reported by younger participants, females and those living in remote versus urban or regional areas.

"Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been saying for a very long time that racism is bad for health. Now we have robust data to back up those experiences," Associate Professor Lovett said.

Dr. Thurber said: "This study is the first time we have had national evidence specific to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on the link between discrimination and such a broad range of outcomes.

"The pervasiveness of discrimination, coupled with its strong and far-ranging links to wellbeing means that there is vast potential to improve health by eliminating [discrimination](#)."

Researchers say exposure to racism is often under-reported and the analysis does not capture exposure to systemic and structural racism.

"Unfortunately, these results will be no surprise to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across the nation but we hope the findings can be used to advocate for support for program and policy approaches to eliminate racism," co-author Professor Tom Calma AO, from the University of Canberra, said.

Janine Mohammed, CEO of the Lowitja Institute, said: "These findings provide us with undeniable evidence that racism is linked to health for our mob.

"They clearly demonstrate the need to address [racism](#) if we are serious about improving our [health](#) and closing gaps."

Provided by Australian National University

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