

African Americans bear the brunt of negative health outcomes of menthol cigarettes

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African Americans represent 12% of the U.S. population, but carried 41% of all menthol-smoking-related premature deaths in the United States between 1980 and 2018, according to a new study researchers

believe is the first to quantify the impact menthol cigarettes have had in Black communities across the country.

"It is well known that [tobacco companies](#), in the 1960s and '70s, targeted menthol cigarettes to African American communities, and menthol cigarettes became ubiquitous in those communities," said David Mendez, lead author of the study and an associate professor in the Department of Health Management and Policy at the U-M School of Public Health.

Menthol cigarettes were responsible for 1.5 million new smokers, 157,000 smoking-related premature deaths and 1.5 million life-years lost among African Americans between 1980 and 2018. Relative to the general population, these figures represent, respectively, 15%, 41% and 50% of the total damage caused by menthol cigarettes during that period, despite African Americans constituting only 12% of the total U.S. population.

For their analysis, published in *Tobacco Control*, researchers utilized a simulation model they had developed for a populationwide study published earlier this year. They also used data from the National Health Interview Survey to feed the model with information specific to the African American community.

"Half of the life-years lost during this period due to menthol smoking occurred among African Americans, and our study results are likely to be conservative," said study co-author Thuy Le. "Menthol cigarettes are an important contributor to health disparities in this country and removing [menthol cigarettes](#) from the market will save thousands of lives, particularly among African Americans."

More information: David Mendez et al, Consequences of a match made in hell: the harm caused by menthol smoking to the African American population over 1980–2018, *Tobacco Control* (2021). [DOI:](#)

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