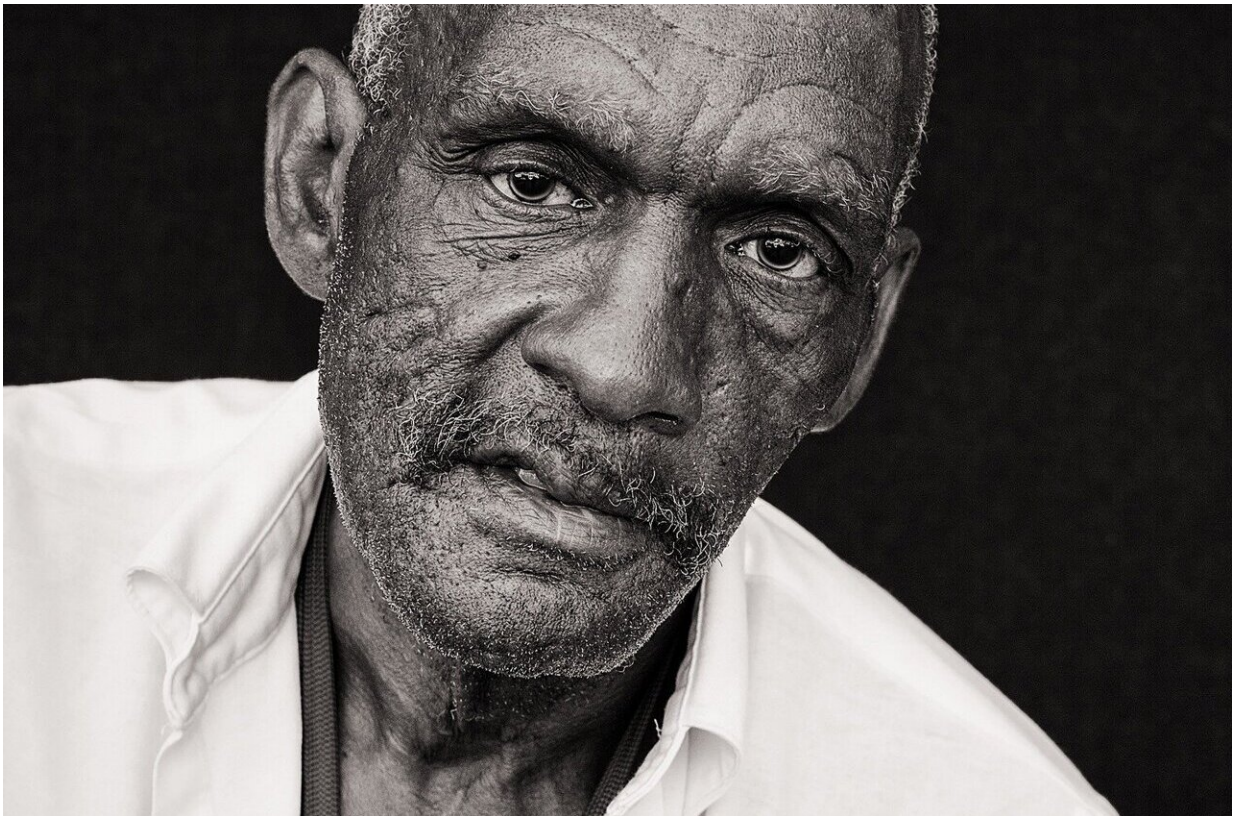


Pandemic stress affects Black adults more than their white peers

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A recent study finds that Black adults experience more pronounced mental health challenges than white adults in response to stresses associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. The study also found that

younger white adults were less adversely affected by stress related to COVID-19 than older white adults.

"We wanted to see how race and age affected the way people responded to mental stresses related to COVID-19," says Shevaun Neupert, co-author of the study and a professor of psychology at North Carolina State University. "Public narratives about the [pandemic](#) have often focused on elevated risks related to COVID-19 for both older adults and Black adults. We wanted to know if older, Black adults were facing 'double jeopardy'—essentially experiencing more pandemic-related mental health challenges than their white counterparts.

"We found that age was only a factor for white adults. Black adults were experiencing significant, pandemic-related mental health challenges regardless of age."

For the study, researchers recruited 526 adults in the U.S. between the ages of 21 and 79. Fifty-four percent of the study participants were white; 46% were Black. Participants were asked to complete online diary entries for 21 consecutive days in October and November 2020.

In their diary entries, participants responded to specific questions aimed at assessing their anxiety and symptoms of depression. Participants were also asked how much [stress](#) they experienced that day, how much of that stress was related to COVID-19, and how much stress they anticipated experiencing in the coming day. In analyzing the study data, the researchers controlled for a variety of variables, including gender, [socioeconomic status](#), and each participant's perceived risk of contracting COVID-19.

In assessing study participant responses, the researchers focused on finding differences between participants, and they did find pronounced differences across white adults in the study. Age was an important factor

in predicting anxiety and [depressive symptoms](#) in response to experiencing or predicting pandemic stress for white study participants. Older white adults—meaning 60 or older—experienced more mental health struggles in response to pandemic stress than younger white adults.

However, the responses to pandemic stress were more pronounced for Black adults regardless of age. When experiencing or anticipating pandemic stress, younger black adults—between the ages of 21 and 30—had more anxiety and depressive symptoms than older white adults experiencing similar stresses.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted system inequities that place Black adults at greater risk of adverse health outcomes, and our findings reflect that," says Ann Pearman, corresponding author of the paper who worked on the study while at Georgia Tech. "Simply put, the stress of the pandemic appears to be placing a greater mental health burden on Black Americans. This is playing out in people's everyday lives, and it has been going on for well over a year and a half now.

"This finding suggests that we need to support the development of culturally competent interventions that address the needs of Black adults and older white adults," Neupert says.

"The finding also highlights the fact that much of the existing literature on how [older adults](#) cope with stress has focused largely on older white adults. More research needs to be done to understand and address stress management processes and mental health in Black adults in general, and in older Black adults in particular."

The study is published in *Journal of Gerontology: Psychological Sciences*.

More information: Ann Pearman et al, Experiencing and Forecasting

COVID-19 Daily Stress on Mental Health Reactivity Across Age and Race, *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B* (2021). DOI: [10.1093/geronb/gbab197](https://doi.org/10.1093/geronb/gbab197)

Provided by North Carolina State University

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