

Approximately 1 in 2 Black adolescents faced online racial discrimination at least once in 2020: study

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Against the backdrop of racial tensions across America in late 2020, online platforms became a place of discussion, discourse and even

protest. Through this time period, Black adolescents experienced a different effect than their White peers; they more distinctly suffered mental health issues after being confronted with online racial discrimination.

Two University of Pittsburgh scientists conducted a [longitudinal study](#) collecting 18,454 daily assessments of 602 Black and White adolescents across the country—58% of them African American—across 58 days of racial tension between March and November 2020. Black [youth](#) experienced increases in online racial [discrimination](#) that predicted worse same- and next-day mental health, concluded the study published online July 19 in the *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*.

These findings contained implications about shaping mental health disparities that can disadvantage Black youths relative to their White peers, the scientists said. They also emphasized the importance of recognizing online spaces as impediments, if not dangers, at such a developmental time for youths and their mental growth and well-being.

"This study showed us the need for programs to decrease online hate crimes as well as procedures by health providers—pediatricians, psychiatrists and others—to mitigate negative mental health effects such as online racial discrimination," said Ming-Te Wang, professor of psychology and education in the School of Education and senior scientist at Pitt's Learning Research & Development Center (LRDC).

Juan Del Toro, LRDC research associate, and co-author Wang set out to study online racial discrimination in the time of COVID-19. While students performed schoolwork at home, they spent more time online and in front of screens—where the racial unrest of 2020 especially took hold in direct-messaging platforms and social media.

They established two primary research goals: Examine the frequency of online racial discrimination before and after the 2020 unrest, and determine if such discrimination predicted [mental health issues](#) among a representative sample of Black youths.

What they found: 1 of 2 Black youths experienced at least one incident of online racism during the study period.

That rate was significantly higher than a previous documented study that found roughly 2 in 5 Black adults reported experiencing the same amount between March and June 2020—a study period barely half as long as the one used by Del Toro and Wang.

"The data were rich as we had Black and White youths' daily survey responses, and these daily self-reports were gathered across multiple periods throughout 2020, enabling us to look at changes in youths' daily experiences of racial discrimination across time and examine the immediate and prolonged mental health consequences of racial discrimination," Del Toro said.

The researchers concluded that changes in policy and medical approach are necessary when such racial traumatic experiences arise. Clinicians should receive training on culturally sensitive assessments and effective communication skills, the scientists found. Racial literacy training and resources to help youth cope with racial events also would benefit [mental health professionals](#).

"These findings have immediate implications for clinical practice," Del Toro said. "Adolescents' chronic exposure to online settings may exacerbate racial disparities in health considering the present study found a negative impact of [racial discrimination](#) on Black youths' but not White youths' mental [health](#)."

More information: Juan Del Toro et al, Online Racism and Mental Health Among Black American Adolescents in 2020, *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry* (2022). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jaac.2022.07.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2022.07.004)

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