

Experience of racism linked with poorer memory and thinking

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Research presented today (Monday 1 August) at the 2022 Alzheimer's Association International Conference (AAIC) in San Diego across two presentations suggest people who experience racism are more likely to

have poor memory and thinking in both midlife and old age.

Multilevel racism associated with lower memory scores

In a study of 942 participants, researchers from Columbia University measured discrimination using the Major Experiences of Discrimination Scale.

More than half of participants were Latin Americans, 23% were black and 19% white adults.

Researchers found that exposure to institutional [racism](#) and racism between persons was associated with lower [memory](#) scores. This association was highest in black participants.

Experiences of structural racism were associated with a type of long-term memory which involves the recollection of events, known as lower episodic memory, among all racial and [ethnic groups](#) included in the study.

Poorer cognition among oldest old is linked to experiences of discrimination

In a second study, scientists from University of California looked at experience of discrimination in a study of Asian, Black, Latino, white, and multi-racial participants who were over the age of 90.

Those who experienced wide-ranging discrimination throughout life had lower [semantic memory](#) in late life compared to those who experienced little to no [discrimination](#). Semantic memory is the ability to recall words and is essential for language.

However, in the study of 445 people, the rate of cognitive decline over an average of 1.2 years didn't change between groups of participants.

Speaking about the findings, Dr. Rosa Sancho, Head of Research from Alzheimer's Research U.K., said: "So far, there's been limited research into whether experiencing racism impacts someone's risk of developing dementia, so these findings begin to fill in that gap. However, while they suggest that experiencing racism is associated with poorer memory and thinking at two different life stages, the study only followed people up for around a year, so it doesn't draw conclusions about someone's risk of subsequently developing dementia.

"A person's dementia risk is a mix of age, genetics, and other lifestyle factors. Although latest estimates find that 40% of all dementia cases could be prevented research is constantly uncovering more about dementia and moving our understanding forward. Larger studies are required to paint a clearer picture at how people's experience of racism may affect known risk factors for dementia.

"We know that dementia does not affect everyone equally including age, sex, and race and targeting these health and research inequalities remains a priority for Alzheimer's Research U.K. There's clearly much to do here but it's great to see research like this being presented at a leading Alzheimer's conference, so that there can be an open discussion about these issues. Alzheimer's Research U.K. wants to fund the best [research](#), that is representative of all people living with [dementia](#), to learn more about how to tackle health inequalities—and we need to reach more communities in new and different ways."

Provided by Alzheimer's Research UK

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