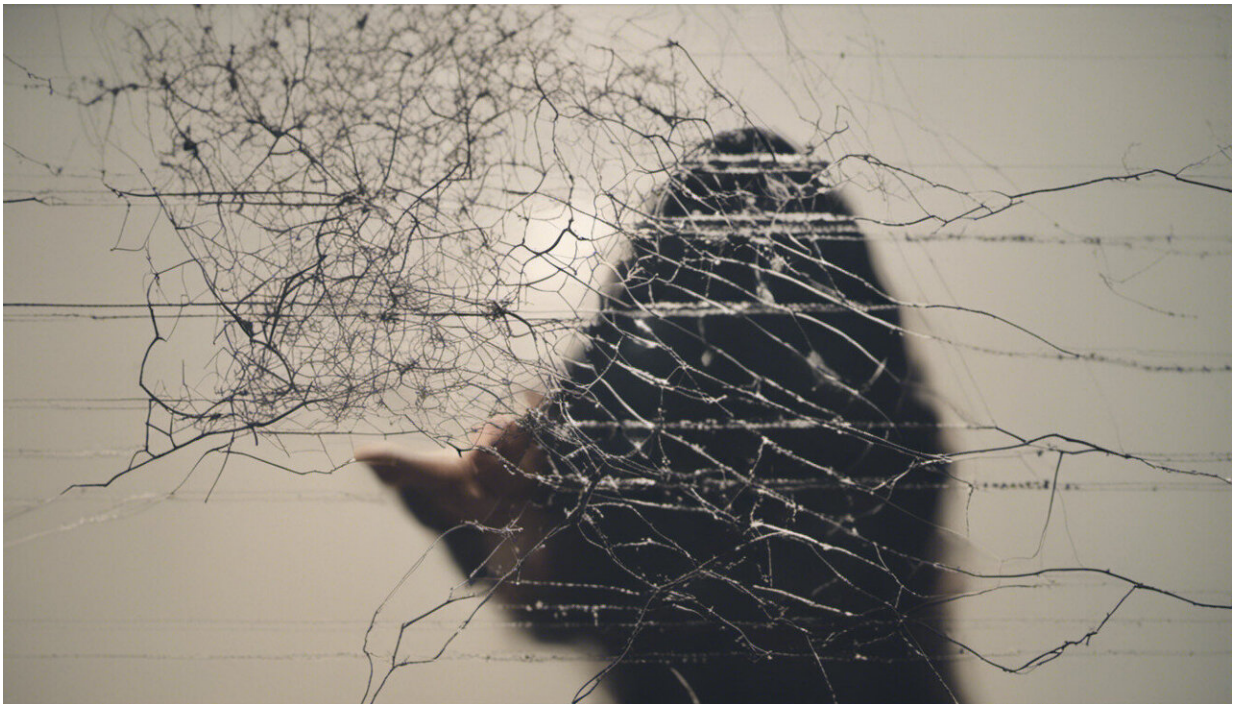


Depression in college-educated Black Americans linked to discrimination

February 1 2023, by Neil Schoenherr



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Racial discrimination was found to be a significant force behind higher levels of depression among college-educated Black Americans, finds a new study from the Brown School at Washington University in St. Louis.

"Our results indicate that there is an alarming level of depression among

upwardly mobile—which we define as college-educated—Black Americans," said Darrell Hudson, an associate professor and lead author of the study "Understanding the Impact of Contemporary Racism on the Mental Health of Middle Class Black Americans." The paper was published Jan. 17 in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*.

"This was surprising to us because the measures of discrimination we used in this study were not as nuanced as we would like, but still incredibly impactful," Hudson said.

Hudson and his co-authors surveyed 526 Black Americans who were 24 years or older and had earned at least a four-year college degree. Nearly 40% of the sample reported symptoms that were indicative of significant depressive symptoms that would warrant follow up. Additionally, 15.5% of the sample reported that they had been diagnosed with depression by a provider at some point in their lives.

Exposure to discrimination was assessed by major and everyday discrimination scales. Respondents were asked about restaurant service, name calling, threats, hiring and firing practices, being stopped by police, etc.

The findings indicated that there is a significant association between everyday discrimination and depressive symptoms, Hudson said. Everyday discrimination alone accounted for 22% of the variance in depressive symptoms. Similarly, reports of major discrimination were significantly associated with more depressive symptoms.

"Respondents report that they have worked extremely hard, attended the right schools and experienced success, if solely defined by greater income and educational attainment," he said. "However, the experiences [respondents](#) have described are deeply hurtful and impactful. They carry

these wounds throughout their lives and some leave the very positions they have trained their entire lives for due to experiences of [discrimination](#)."

These experiences go beyond overt instances such as name calling, Hudson said.

"Rather, these experiences, in contemporary times, are more subtle," he said. "It's not being able to get merit-based promotions or being shut out of [informal networks](#) (such as friendships outside of work or mentorship). It is the burden of simultaneously being tokenized and marginalized, especially post-2020. It seems that the psychological sting is even greater to respondents as they find that their efforts have not protected them from racism. They are treated poorer regardless of their efforts."

Mental health professionals should be aware of the unique experiences that upwardly mobile Black Americans endure, Hudson said.

"While there has been an explosion of work related to diversity, equity and inclusion in various sectors, more efforts are needed to ensure equity in hiring and promotion practices," he said. "They must also work to break down informal barriers, which are subtle and harder to identify but pernicious."

More information: Darrell Hudson et al, Understanding the Impact of Contemporary Racism on the Mental Health of Middle Class Black Americans, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* (2023). [DOI: 10.3390/ijerph20031660](https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20031660)

Provided by Washington University in St. Louis

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