Racism Linked to Depression in Black and Latino Children

May 3, 2010

Black and Latino kids who have experienced racial discrimination are more likely to have symptoms of depression, according to researchers of a study presented May 2 at the Pediatric Academic Societies (PAS) annual meeting in Vancouver.

Lee M. Pachter, DO, from Drexel University College of Medicine in Philadelphia and his colleagues conducted surveys with 277 minority children ages 9 to 18. About two thirds of the children were African American or Latino, and 19 percent were multiracial.

Pachter's team asked the children about 23 hypothetical scenarios where racial discrimination could be perceived, such as being followed by security guards in a store or being called names. Eighty-eight percent of the kids recounted experiences of discrimination, and 12 percent reported that they'd experienced discrimination in at least half of the 23 episodes.

"Not only do most minority children experience discrimination, but they experience it in multiple contexts: in schools, in the community, with adults and with peers," Pachter said. "It's kind of like the elephant in the corner of the room. It's there, but nobody really talks about it. And it may have significant mental and physical health consequences in these children's lives."

Pachter and his colleagues also administered two questionnaires designed to measure depression and self-esteem. They found a link between both racism and depression and self-esteem and depression. Interestingly, they did not find a link between racism and self-esteem. The authors of the study are calling for further research to verify their results and explore them in more detail.

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