When Prejudice and Bias Get All in Your Head

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The way the human brain processes racism is similar to the way it processes trauma—and it can lead to mental distress, according to a study published in the *Journal of Counseling Psychology* and reported by Health Day.

For the study, researchers from the University at Albany, State University of New York examined 66 studies of 18,140 black adults in the United States. All the studies were conducted between 1996 and 2011 and focused on mental health and perceived racism.

Findings showed that an individual's response to perceived racism was consistent with a reaction to trauma, including somatization (psychological distress felt as physical pain), interpersonal sensitivity and anxiety. In addition, when the racist act was extremely stressful, the person was more likely to report mental distress.

"The relationship between perceived racism and self-reported depression and anxiety is quite robust, providing a reminder that experiences of racism may play an important role in the health disparities phenomenon," said Alex Pieterse, PhD, the lead study author.

Researchers suggested that the link between mental health and racism could also explain and contribute to physical health disparities. For example, blacks experience higher rates of hypertension, or high blood pressure, a serious condition that's associated with stress and depression.

To help address these disparities, researchers believe doctors and therapists should routinely discuss racism with their black patients during exams.

Did you know that where you live could also affect your brain's structure? Click here to find out more.

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