

Discrimination Is Associated With Depression Among Minority Children

May 3, 2010 — Minority children often encounter racism in their daily lives, and those who experience discrimination more often have more symptoms of depression, according to a study presented May 2 at the Pediatric Academic Societies (PAS) annual meeting in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

"Unfortunately, minority children perceive discrimination often in their lives," said Lee M. Pachter, DO, co-author of the study and professor of pediatrics at Drexel University College of Medicine and St. Christopher's Hospital for Children in Philadelphia. "Fifty-five years after *Brown v. Board of Education* and the civil rights movement, racism is still common in their lives."

Dr. Pachter and his colleagues surveyed 277 minority children ages 9-18 years to determine the contexts in which they perceive racism and the relationship between discrimination, depression and self-esteem. Participants filled out questionnaires that included 23 scenarios in which they might perceive discrimination, such as being followed by a store security guard, getting poor service in a restaurant or being accused of doing something wrong at school.

About two-thirds of the children were Latino or African American, and 19 percent were multiracial.

Results showed that 88 percent had at least one experience with racism, and nearly 12 percent had experienced racial discrimination in at least half of the situations described in the survey. The most common forms of discrimination were racial remarks, being called insulting names and being followed by security guards in stores. Experiences were similar for Latinos and African Americans, boys and girls, and younger and older children.

"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," Dr. 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."

Researchers also administered the Child Depression Inventory and the Rosenberg Self Esteem Questionnaire to 52 minority children. They found a significant correlation between perceived racism and depression, self-esteem and depression, but not between racism and self-esteem.

The next step is to look at whether discrimination creates stress that leads to racial/ethnic disparities in physical and mental health, Dr. Pachter said.

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