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Racism and It's Harmful Effects

Racism is **the belief that different races possess distinct characteristics, abilities, or qualities, especially so as to distinguish them as inferior or superior to one another. Racism has existed throughout human history. It may be defined as the hatred of one person by another — or the belief that another person is less than human — because of skin colour, language, customs, place of birth or any factor that supposedly reveals the basic nature of that person. It has influenced wars, slavery, the formation of nations, and legal codes.**

**During the past 500-1000 years, racism on the part of Western powers toward non-Westerners has had a far more significant impact on history than any other form of racism (such as racism among Western groups or among Easterners, such as Asians, Africans, and others). The most notorious example of racism by the West has been slavery, particularly the enslavement of Africans in the New World (slavery itself dates back thousands of years). This enslavement was accomplished because of the racist belief that Black Africans were less fully human than white Europeans and their descendants.**

**Racism can exert negative effects on the self-concepts, health and well-being, and life trajectories of both nondominant racial–ethnic (NDRE) youth and youth-serving providers. In the face of growing nationalism, ethnocentrism, xenophobia, and overt expressions of racism, the Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine recognizes the critically important need to address the issue of racism and its impact on both NDRE youth and youth-serving providers. Organizations involved in clinical care delivery and health professions training and education must recognize the deleterious effects of racism on health and well-being, take strong positions against discriminatory policies, practices, and events, and take action to promote safe and affirming environments. The positions presented in this paper provide a comprehensive set of recommendations to promote routine clinical assessment of youth experiences of racism and its potential impact on self-concept, health and well-being, and for effective interventions when affected youth are identified. The positions also reflect the concerns of NDRE providers, trainees, and students potentially impacted by racism, chronic minority stress, and vicarious trauma and the imperative to create safe and affirming work and learning environments across all levels of practice, training, and education in the health professions. In this position paper, Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine affirms its commitment to foundational moral and ethical principles of justice, equity, and respect for humanity; acknowledges racism in its myriad forms; defines strategies to best promote resiliency and support the health and well-being of NDRE youth, providers, trainees, and students; and provides recommendations on the ways to best effect systemic change. A team of USC and UCLA scientists found that racist experiences appear to increase inflammation in African American individuals, raising their risk of chronic illness, according to the study published in the journal Psych neuroendocrinology on April 18.**

**"We know discrimination is linked to health outcomes, but no one was sure exactly how it harmed health," said April Thames, associate professor of psychology and psychiatry at USC Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences. "I looked at it as a chronic stressor. Our results showed that racial discrimination appears to trigger an inflammatory response among African Americans at the cellular level."**

**The survival of all living things depends on their ability to respond to infections, stresses and injuries. Such threats trigger an immune system response to fend off pathogens and repair damaged tissues. A select group of genes are key to this defense mechanism, and inflammation is a sign that those genes are working to counter the threat or repair the damage.**

**Inflammation serves to protect an organism from a health threat. But if someone feels under threat for long periods of time, their health may suffer significantly with chronic inflammation.**

**"If those genes remain active for an extended period of time, that can promote heart attacks, neurodegenerative diseases, and metastatic cancer," says co-author Steve Cole of the University of California, Los Angeles**