

Black and Latino Communities Face Greater Risk for Dementia Burden

Health and socioeconomic factors affect their dementia risk.

March 12, 2021 By [Alicia Green](#)

[Racial disparities](#) continue to persist when it comes to [dementia](#), leaving Black and Latino families suffering from the emotional and financial effects of this debilitating condition, reports the [American Heart Association](#).

A study published in JAMA Neurology last year found that older Black adults were two to three times more likely to be diagnosed with dementia than white adults. Meanwhile, Latinos were 1.5 times at greater risk.

Researchers aren't exactly sure why Blacks and Latinos are disproportionately affected by dementia, according to Jason Resendez, executive director for the UsAgainstAlzheimer's Center for Brain Health Equity in Washington, DC.

"More and more evidence is pointing to a mix of factors that are health-related, such as disparities in diabetes and heart disease," he said. "But there are also social and economic factors, such as education, social isolation, smoking, low income and other inequalities."

Experts also believe that the stress of racism plays a role in dementia risk for Black and Latino people. Overall, everyday stress is known to increase the risk of dementia.

However, many dementia risk factors can be mitigated. Among these risk factors are high blood pressure, obesity, smoking, diabetes, physical inactivity, depression, hearing loss, less education, air pollution, social isolation, excessive alcohol consumption and traumatic brain injury.

Resendez notes that all these factors are "intertwined with social inequities." Blacks and Latinos are more likely to have uncontrolled blood pressure levels, which puts them at greater risk for stroke. (A [stroke](#) doubles a person's risk for dementia.)

According to Chandra Jackson, PhD, MS, a research investigator with the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, people of color have been more susceptible to conditions that promote poor health due to years of discrimination. This discrimination has affected housing, education, employment, earnings and benefits, among other areas of life.

To eliminate dementia disparities, Jackson said we must begin fighting systemic racism by promoting healthier living for Blacks and Latinos through greater access to economic stability, healthy foods, opportunities for physical activity and better social support for families and caregivers in communities hit hardest.

In addition, experts encourage young people of color to start improving their brain health early on and to quit smoking, adhere to a healthier diet, exercise, lose weight and maintain good blood pressure and cholesterol and glucose levels.

For related coverage, read "[Are Chronic Negative Thoughts a Risk Factor for Dementia?](#)" and "[Certain Mental Disorders May Lead to Early Development of Alzheimer's.](#)"

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