

Childhood Obesity Intensified by Racial Discrimination

A study adds to the growing body of research showing racial discrimination puts people at risk for various health issues.

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A new study led by New York University (NYU) researchers found that [racial discrimination](#) may increase the risk for [childhood obesity](#), which already affects Latino and Hispanic youth at higher rates.

“Exposure to racial discrimination must be acknowledged as both a social determinant of obesity and a significant contributor to obesity disparities among children and adolescents,” said the study’s lead author, Adolfo Cuevas, PhD, an assistant professor of social and behavioral sciences at the NYU School of Global Public Health in an [NYU news release](#).

Childhood obesity affects nearly one in five U.S. children and teens, according to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#). Latino and Black youth experience high rates of obesity, which research attributes to factors such as poverty, lack of access to healthy foods and single-parent households.

Published in [JAMA Network Open](#), the study adds to existing research that shows racial discrimination is a [stressor](#) that puts people at risk for various health issues, such as sleep problems, high cortisol levels and poor mental health, according to the news release.

The study examined data from 6,463 children ages 9 to 11 and measured their experiences of racial discrimination by asking them to reflect on whether they were treated unfairly by other people because of their race or ethnicity. In a follow-up one year later, participants’ body mass index (BMI) and waist circumference were measured.

Researchers found that children who experienced greater racial discrimination had at higher BMI and larger waist.

“We tested discrimination at one time point, but it’s important to recognize that prolonged exposure to racial discrimination has the potential to further increase the risk of obesity,” said Cuevas.

“It is crucial for researchers, clinicians, educators, and policymakers to join forces with communities to establish evidence-based strategies aimed at preventing exposure to racial discrimination in order to improve obesity at the population level,” Cuevas added.

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