

Exclusion of Women of Color Leads to Disparities in Menopause Research

Women's health studies seldom account for the effects of marginalization on the health status of Latinas and Black women.

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Latinas and Black women may experience earlier-onset [menopause](#) compared with white women but current research may not reflect that reality due to participant selection bias in women's health studies, according to new research.

University of Michigan School of Public Health (UMSPH) researchers examined data from the [Study of Women's Health Across the Nation](#) (SWAN) cohort. They found a failure to account for critical racial differences in participants such as weathering, which refers to accelerated health declines among members of minority groups due to systemic marginalization. As a framework, weathering was developed by Michigan Public Health professor Arlene Geronimus, ScD, according to a [UMSPH article](#).

"We were able to quantify the racial differences in the rate of exclusion from SWAN due to earlier menopause and then statistically account for it in SWAN's data," said Alexis Reeves, PhD, who conducted the work while a doctoral student at UMSPH, in the article. "We found that Black and Hispanic women had statistically significant earlier natural, and particularly surgical, menopause than white women."

Published in the [International Journal of Epidemiology](#), the findings showed that Latina and Black women reached menopause 1.2 years earlier than white women when exclusion due to weathering was accounted for. SWAN's initial data reported little to no racial differences in menopausal age, according to UMSPH.

"The study suggests that this common bias may lead to underestimation of racial disparities in health and aging and is important to consider in further research," Reeves said.

Reeves and other researchers hope the findings will bring attention to addressing selection bias and help eliminate these racial disparities and address negative health outcomes in marginalized populations.

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