

Abstract

Racial Discrimination, regardless of Form Impacts Health Outcomes across the Lifespan

Manka Nkimbenq, MPH, RN, Johns Hopkins University School of Nursing, Baltimore, MD and Bernice Rumala, PhD, M.A., Ed.M., M.Phil., Institute for Healthcare Improvement, Southern California, CA

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Discrimination based on hairstyle(s) is one form of discrimination that racial/ethnic minorities in the United States face. Discrimination, in particular racial discrimination affects both physical and mental health outcomes. It is also associated with physiologic markers such as shortening of telomere length; a sign of premature aging. Racial discrimination influences health through differential access to resources and as a stressor. The stress of racial discrimination contributes to the activation of the sympathetic nervous system and other negative inflammatory processes associated with multiple chronic diseases.

Case studies show that minority parents dissuade their children against certain hairstyles or individuals report making a conscious (and often costlier) effort to style their hair in a way that is 'professional', for fear of being perceived as unkempt. While the evidence is currently limited, it is likely that hair-based discrimination adds to other forms of interpersonal and structural discrimination. Racial/ethnic minority immigrants may offer a unique perspective on the experiences of racial discrimination. The Older African Immigrant Study is exploring older African immigrants' experiences of racial discrimination in the U.S and preliminary findings will be presented. The author will also share her lived experiences of hair discrimination to better inform policy towards solutions. Greater understanding of the impact of racial discrimination on health can inform health policies and build health equity.

Diversity and culture Public health or related nursing Social and behavioral sciences

