RACISM, ADVERSITY, AND CHILD HEALTH

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GOALS

• Discuss racism & discrimination as a psychosocial stressor that may contribute to poor health
• Review the data on the relationship between racism and child health
• Determine if racism is a common occurrence in the lives of children of color
• Discuss potential mechanisms through which racism may contribute to suboptimal health
• Propose racism as an Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE)
Life Expectancy:

- Society Hill: 88 years
- Strawberry Mansion: 68 years
2.5 MILES...20 YEARS WHY???

- Income and Education
- Housing
- Neighborhood safety
- Access to exercise
- Access to healthy food
- Toxic exposures (lead...)
- Access to transportation (to get to jobs)
- Access to quality preventive health care

DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

- Behavior
- Social
- Medical
- Genetic
- Biology
- Environment
DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

- Behavior
- Social
- Medical
- Genetic
- Biology
- Environment

97% expenditures
10-20% outcomes
DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

- BEHAVIOR
- ENVIRONMENT
- SOCIAL

3% EXPENDITURES
50-70% OUTCOMES

RACISM

- Negative beliefs, attitudes, and actions resulting from categorizing individuals or groups based on phenotype, heritage, or culture.
  - Prejudice: Beliefs, attitudes, assumptions
  - Discrimination: Actions and behaviors
LEVELS OF RACISM

• Interpersonal
• Structural
• Internalized

DOES RACISM AFFECT CHILDREN’S HEALTH?

40 papers found in medical and social science literature

• 8: Birth outcomes (prematurity, LBW)
• 4: Cardiovascular health
• 2: Metabolic disease
• 26: Behavioral /Mental health

Pachter LM, Garcia Coll CG. J Develop Behav Pediatr 2009
ARE PERCEPTIONS OF RACISM COMMON IN CHILDREN?

Study of 277 children in two northeast cities

- Between 7-18 yrs of age
  - 85 African American
  - 104 Latino (mostly Puerto Rican)
  - 20 West Indian/Caribbean
  - 53 Multiracial/Multicultural

Pachter, Bernstein, Szalacha, Garcia Coll. *Health & Social Work*, 2010

ITEMS

“Watched closely or followed around by security guards or clerks at a store or the mall”

“People hold their bags tight when you pass them”

“Teachers assume you’re not smart or intelligent”

“Got poor or slow service at a restaurant”

“Someone made a bad or insulting remark about your race, ethnicity, or language”

“Watched more closely by security at school”

“Were treated unfairly by a police officer”
HOW MANY PERCEIVED RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IN AT LEAST 1 OF 24 SITUATIONS?...

8%
27%
52%
69%
88%

HOW MANY PERCEIVED RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IN AT LEAST 1 OF 24 SITUATIONS?...

88% (245 of 277)
ARE PERCEPTIONS OF RACISM COMMON IN CHILDREN?

- 88% had at least 1 experience
- Average number of experiences: 6/24
- 12% answered at least ⅓ of the questions positively

DOES RACISM AFFECT HEALTH?

- Relationship between racism & depressive symptoms in children
- 52 minority youth (9-18 years)

![Diagram](image)
RACISM & MENTAL HEALTH IN TEENS

• 1170 African American & Afro Caribbean youth (13-17)
• 85% experienced discrimination
• Discrimination associated with
  • Major depression
  • Anxiety
  • Social phobia

Pachter, Caldwell, Jackson, Bernstein. J Racial Eth Health Disparities, 2017

HOW DOES RACISM EFFECT HEALTH?

• MACRO:
  • Segregation → increased exposure
    • Environmental toxins
    • Inadequate transportation
    • Food deserts
    • Violence
    • Safe places to exercise
HOW DOES RACISM EFFECT HEALTH?

• MACRO:
  • Structural Racism ➔ resource inequity
    • Jobs
    • Education
    • Health care
    • Justice

HOW DOES RACISM EFFECT HEALTH?

• INTERMEDIATE LEVEL:
  • Inter-personal Racism ➔ psychological distress
HOW DOES RACISM EFFECT HEALTH?

- MICRO LEVEL:
  - Psychosocial stress → physiological dysfunction

Racism is a chronic psychosocial toxic stressor that can cause dysregulation of normal physiology and biology

(Allostatic load)
EFFECTS OF TOXIC STRESS-ALLOSTATIC LOAD

Stress hormones remain high, and may burnout (dysregulated)

- Shrinkage of nerve cell in the brain (amygdala, hippocampus, prefrontal cortex)
  - Emotional regulation
  - Executive function (attention, cognitive flexibility, problem solving, working memory…)
- Poor regulation of immunity, inflammation, metabolism, growth
- Epigenetic changes (methylation, telomere length)

ALLOSTATIC SYSTEMS

- Cortisol
- Inflammation
- Immunity
- Metabolism

Health Disparities

- Diabetes
- Obesity
- Asthma
- CV Disease
- Depression
The effects of racism can have health consequences both during childhood and throughout the lifecourse into adulthood.

Racism as an Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE)
KAISER (SAN DIEGO) ACE STUDY

- 17,000 adults
- Childhood stressors
  - Physical, emotional, sexual abuse
  - Physical, emotional neglect
  - Parental mental illness
  - Family interpersonal violence
  - Substance use
  - Divorce/separation
  - Incarcerated relative

Almost two-thirds of adults surveyed reported at least one Adverse Childhood Experience – and the majority of respondents who reported at least one ACE reported more than one.
KAISER ACE STUDY

More Adverse Childhood Experiences, more health problems as adults:

- Mental health
- Risk taking behaviors
- Reproductive health (early pregnancy, STI)
- Victimization
- Physical health/chronic illness
  - Heart disease
  - Cancer
  - Stroke
  - Emphysema
  - Autoimmune disease
  - Headaches

LIFE EXPECTANCY

People with six or more ACEs died nearly 20 years earlier on average than those without ACEs.
Life Expectancy: 68 years

Life Expectancy: 88 years

THE PHILADELPHIA
ACE PROJECT
### PHILLY ACE SCORE

#### “TRADITIONAL ACES”
- **Abuse**
  - Physical
  - Emotional
  - Sexual
- **Neglect**
  - Physical
  - Emotional
- **Household Dysfunction**
  - Domestic Violence
  - Parental mental health issue
  - Substance Use
  - Incarcerated family member

#### “ADDITIONAL” ACES
- Witness Violence
- Unsafe Neighborhood
- Racism/Discrimination
- Bullied
- Foster care

### PHILADELPHIA ACE PROJECT
- Follow up telephone interview of adults in the Southeastern Pennsylvania Household Health Survey
  - 1784 interviews
- ACE questions and other information
### ACEs in Philly vs. Original Kaiser Sample

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Kaiser Sample</th>
<th>Philly Sample</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>TRADITIONAL ACEs</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Emotional abuse†</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>33.2%</td>
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<td>Physical abuse**</td>
<td>28.3%</td>
<td>35.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sexual abuse†</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physical neglect*</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emotional neglect*</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
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<td>Substance using household member*</td>
<td>26.9%</td>
<td>34.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mentally ill household member*</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
<td>24.1%</td>
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<td>Witnessed domestic violence†</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Incarcerated household member*</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ADDITIONAL ACEs</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Witnessed violence</td>
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<td>40.5%</td>
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<td>Experienced discrimination</td>
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<td>34.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unsafe neighborhood</td>
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<td>27.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Experienced Bullying</td>
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<td>7.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lived in foster care</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
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### SUMMARY

- Racism is a stressor that's commonly experienced by minority children and youth
- There’s a small but growing literature on the association between perceived racism and child health outcomes
- Racism can be conceptualized as a toxic stressor that contributes to allostatic load (physiologic dysregulation) and subsequent illness
- The illnesses that are linked to this physiologic dysregulation are the same illnesses that show racial and ethnic disparities
- Racism experienced in childhood should be thought of as an Adverse Childhood Experience that can affect health and wellbeing throughout the lifecourse
ADVERSITY → OUTCOMES

ASSETS/ADVERSITY → OUTCOMES

- FAMILY
- PEERS/FRIENDS
- OTHER ADULTS
- COMMUNITY
- NEIGHBORHOOD
- SOCIAL CAPITAL
- + COPING STYLE
- "GRIT"
- LOCUS OF CONTROL