

Pilot Project: Racial Disparities in Cognitive Impairment: The Role of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES)

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Abstract

Cognitive decline is common in the U.S. and greatly impacts quality of life, both for those who experience it and for those who care for them. Due to the high burdens associated with cognitive impairment and the fact that Black Americans experience impairment at higher rates than Whites, this is an important disparity to understand and address. Stress experienced in early life is a promising explanatory factor, since: (a) stress and cognition are linked, (b) childhood stressors been shown to have a range of negative implications later in life, and (c) Black children experience more stressors than White children, on average. The objectives of this project is to examine whether adverse experiences in childhood help explain Black-White disparities in cognitive impairment at older ages and to examine whether race moderates the relationship between adverse experiences in childhood and cognitive decline. The proposed analysis will draw on data from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), which includes both the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) questionnaire and self-reported data on whether the respondent experienced worsening memory loss or confusion.