Racism and Stress: Partial Bibliography

Alan Zaslavsky put out a request for studies on racism and stress in April 2010 on the Spirit of 1848 listserv. Here’s a list of studies sent to him. Special thanks to Magdalene Venator-Santiago, David Williams, Paula Braveman, Gloria Beckles, Alice-Furumoto-Dawson and Nancy Krieger.


McEwen BS and Gianaros, Central role of the brain in stress and adaptation: Links to SES, health and disease. Annals of the Ny Academy of Sciences Vol 1186 (just published)


Sherman James authored a number of seminal articles in the 1980s and ‘90s on what he termed, “John Henryism,” an historically rooted form of effortful coping, specific to the intersection of race and class for African-Americans, especially men, its impact on hypertension and cardio-vascular health.


Some other early, ground breaking studies, done in Detroit:


Note: Nancy Krieger cautions: “While the "stress" pathway conceptualized in relation to interpersonal interaction is one of the pathways by which racism can harm health (whether directly, via physiologic responses, or by affecting health behaviors, e.g., smoking, that affect health), it is critical to pay heed to structural as well as individual-level aspects of racism and how it shapes the myriad components of material and social deprivation and other adverse exposures and experiences that harm health. Reducing the impact of racism on health to a matter of "stress" only is inadequate, a point made in many of the articles listed below.

It likewise is important to recognize, for research that obtains data on self-reported experiences of racial discrimination, that these self-reports of racial discrimination are precisely that: self-reports, with the implication being that what is reported is what people are able and willing to report (and hence not simply a measure of "perceived discrimination"). Whether such self-reports actually capture the full extent of people's experiences is an empirical question (and one under investigation).

For discussion of these issues see, for example:


See also:


Finally: There is a growing body of work on stressors from a wide variety of adversities, ranging from the early infancy to the workplace and their impact on health. Some of this can be accessed by a search under “stress” on the Unnatural Causes Health equity research database: http://www.unnaturalcauses.org/resources.php