

# What Will Racial Discrimination Bring to Teenagers?

Yanting Liu

College of Social Science, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, G3 8PX, United Kingdom

2683634L@student.gla.ac.uk

**Keywords:** Racial discrimination, Traumatic stress, Minority teenager

**Abstract:** Racism, a long-standing social problem, is often not limited to physical harm but also linked to psychological damage and traumatic stress, which usually occurs among people of color and affects them for a long time. This paper discusses the harm caused by racial discrimination to color teenagers and how such traumatic stress affects their behavior and life through the analysing of existing literature. According to the analysis, racial discrimination can affect the mental health status of adolescents, leading to adolescents suffering from traumatic stress. Traumatic stress caused by racial discrimination can affect teenagers' mental health and make them perform worse in academic fields. Meanwhile, racial discrimination also leads to the drinking problem of colored teenagers to escape the psychological pressure brought by racial discrimination. Psychological intervention can alleviate the psychological trauma caused by racial discrimination. Providing a safe treatment environment and therapists' empathy will improve the effectiveness of treatment. The significance of this paper is to provide guidance and ideas for future research, help researchers to understand the psychological impact of racial discrimination on adolescents quickly, and facilitate further research.

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, globalization has developed rapidly, and people of different races have experienced more integration with the rising rate of immigration. Racial discrimination is an expression of different types of behaviors and systems based on racism [1]. Racism is an ideology that rationalizes the superiority of some races and reinforces the unequal and oppressive status among different ethnic groups [2]. Due to the impact of culture shock, ethnic minorities are likely to experience the harm of racism. For example, black people living in the United States are more likely to experience racial discrimination.

As racial discrimination becomes more frequent, minorities are at increased risk for post-traumatic stress disorder. Traumatic stress disorder is a dangerous mental disease in which the victim's emotions and cognition will change and affect their life [3]. Previous studies have shown that racial discrimination can lead to psychological stress. The victim's overall well-being, self-perception and even health can be affected. Traumatic stress can affect the victim's mental state [4]. According to research, 90 per cent of black teenagers experience racial discrimination, and the psychological distress caused by discrimination stays with them for a long time [5]. There was no systematic summary of the research on adolescents' behavior after discrimination in the past. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to summarize the impact of racial discrimination on adolescents and the improvement of the effectiveness of psychological intervention.

This paper will discuss the harm caused by racial discrimination to teenagers of color by reviewing existing articles. This paper will first discuss the traumatic stress caused by racial discrimination among adolescents. Next, it discusses the negative impact on teenagers' academic performance and the problem of alcohol abuse among teenagers of color caused by such traumatic stress. The penultimate part of the article will analyze the existing psychological intervention methods and methods to improve intervention effectiveness. Under this background, teenagers can also easily suffer racial discrimination at school. Therefore, this article will focus on analysing teenagers' injuries caused by racial discrimination.

## **2. Negative psychological effects on adolescents by racial discrimination**

### **2.1. Traumatic stress resulted from racial discrimination in adolescents**

There is no denying that racial discrimination will negatively affect psychological health. In the past several decades, color people experienced racial discrimination. Racial discrimination is a stress source in color people's lives, a potentially traumatic form of victimization for adolescents. People of color are likely to experience adverse, uncontrollable, and emergent events due to their race. Most forms of racism attack a person's sense of self, and multicultural social background reinforces the possibility of this happening. As the U.S. population becomes more diverse in center century, young people of color are also experiencing the psychological burden of racial discrimination. According to research, 30% of adolescents who experience race-based violence will produce the three diagnostic criteria of traumatic stress syndrome. Both males and females will suffer from racial discrimination post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) [6]. Race-based traumatic stress can be broken down into four subcategories: first, there can be fear and emotional harm caused by an individual or group; Secondly, the inability to face racial pressure alone; At the same time, this racial pressure creates an element of severe tension; Finally, racism leads to anxiety or fear from the social system [7].

Race-based traumatic stress is usually not physical, which is psychological harm. Meanwhile, traumatic stress occurs repeatedly over a lifetime in specific events and situations. According to the traumatic stress model proposed by [8], the traumatic stress model can be divided into three essential elements: firstly, the negative subjective evaluation or perception of events, which means that people experience emotional pain simultaneously as these traumas. People of color will experience the stress of race-based discrimination, which can harm and threaten a person's self-perception and create the emotional and psychological burden of self-doubt. Secondly, when talking about traumatic stress, the event is thought to occur suddenly. This element is harmful because it is more challenging to adapt to an event without warning than to one that arises gradually [8]. The damage of racial discrimination often occurs suddenly and can directly harm the victim without notice. Finally, uncontrollability is also one of the factors that can contribute to traumatic stress. A certain amount of control over events is protection. When people have control over an event, they will have a specific ability to predict the event's occurrence, and this ability to predict also makes a person feel more secure. When people cannot predict whether an injury will happen, the constant stress and tension in waiting will prolong their pain.

Some scholars have found that similar to rape, violence or war, and racial discrimination is an oppressive act that attacks an individual's sense of self through violence. Three symptoms of re-experiencing (aggressive events), avoidance (trying to avoid feelings, places or people associated with trauma) and physical arousal (hypervigilance) have been found in people who have experienced racism, and these three emotions have been included in the findings of trauma researchers and clinicians (perception) [9]. At the same time, studies have shown that various forms of racial discrimination will become the starting point of other stress, creating conditions for other pain and aggravating stress. Racism has existed in different forms in life for a long time, even leading to people's vulnerability [9].

### **2.2. The current situation faced by minority teenagers**

In recent years, more and more scholars have focused on adolescent risk-taking behavior, such as drinking, fighting, and using drugs. Non-white ethnic backgrounds often lead teens of color to experience mutated racial slurs and stereotypes. Compared with youth in Europe and the United States, minority youth experience more discrimination, unequal, disrespectful, and unliked treatment. According to the research by [10], 65% of Mexican youth report having experienced discrimination from outside the country. Teenagers' pressure comes from several aspects. Teenagers of color will confront multicultural backgrounds. Teenagers are more likely to encounter harm from racism and affect their self-perception. Persistent discrimination and exclusion from mainstream society may accompany adolescents of color due to racism. However long-term exposure to such an environment can lead to negative self-evaluation [11].

More pronounced inequities were found in medical practice. Firstly, people of color have less access to effective psychotherapy than whites. They have less access to therapy. When they do get

care, the quality of psychotherapy is not high. There are many practical obstacles in the treatment of negative emotions. The doctor is unfamiliar with the patient's language, lacks knowledge of the patient's cultural background, or is even prejudiced against people of color. At the same time, from the perspective of patients, they do not trust doctors enough and have a nervous mood, which leads to poor quality of treatment, unable to achieve the expected effect, and unable to truly solve the mental health problems of victims of racial discrimination [9].

Marginalized races are not only denied adequate treatment, but they are also more likely to face police brutality. For example, in the United States, more than three times as many black men (both adult males and boys) were killed by police as white men in the 2015 statistics [12], and they faced misconduct with excessive use of force. 57% of these cases involved physical violence, and 23% involved firearms [13]. What is clear is that having experienced or witnessed police violence can have a significant impact on African American teenagers' mental health and behaviors. Raja [14] found in his communication with African American boys that most of them believed that they had experienced marginalization and had become a threat to the larger society, including the police. They often feel fear in such a living environment, and they try to change their clothing and behavior to protect themselves to survive. At the same time, the impact of unequal treatment of violence can negatively impact. Because 10–11-year-olds are more aware of moral issues, fairness and social justice, experiencing racial discrimination and unequal violence during this period can cause feelings of fear and threat. Experiencing the effects of racism by both parents and peers can exacerbate their psychological worries. It directly or indirectly reinforces feelings of inequality, powerlessness, and victimization. In addition to fearing for one's safety, it may lead to growing up to recognize violent behavior as an appropriate way to deal with them and conflict [15] while resisting attention to mental health and expressing appropriate emotional responses [13].

### **3. Racial discrimination leads to behavioral effects on adolescents**

When it comes to racism, stigmatization and stereotypes of certain groups are brought up together. The unique characteristics of an individual's initial perception and subsequent debasement of that individual often form the stigmatization of that individual [16] and most stigmatization is accompanied by negative evaluations of others. Meanwhile, stereotype is a general evaluation of a group of people, without considering the differences of each individual in the group [17]. Members of the group are tagged with traits, and when they meet the definition of the group, their behavior is rationalized [18]. In school life, negative stereotypes of a group are more likely to lead to racial discrimination. First, some people who are stereotyped as negative will drop out of a discipline to avoid feeling powerless in the face of negative emotions [17]. Second, as the perception of the crowd when the reality conforms to their expectations of the community stereotypes, when perception due to some angered by sealed negative behavior, will adopt the attitude of disdain to response the stereotype [18], and this kind of the attitude of disdain will let the students who had been marginalized experience discrimination.

#### **3.1. The impact of negative racial stereotypes on scholarship**

Social stereotypes have an impact on performance. When stereotypes of public groups have negative perceptions of certain groups, marginalized groups try their best to avoid confirming negative stereotypes. Such behaviors are self-threatening dilemmas and consume more energy [19]. African American students, for example, are seen as a proxy for incompetence. And such stereotypes can affect their academic ability. They need to cofound much more psychological challenges than white students, especially in the case of threatened academic performance. Tests and classroom presentations will bring more psychological pressure on them, which will affect their interpretation. African American students need to spend time-fighting against negative stereotypes. Integration shock will occur when black students and white students are integrated, leading to the anxiety of black students, who will develop feelings of inferiority [20]. At the same time, some rumors even filled the whole environment. For example, the low learning ability of black students would lead to internal friction and self-doubt among black students.

Moreover, stigmatisation can affect the student's academic record. Students under the stigma

dilemma and the students who are treated equally have a 15 IQ points gap. Meanwhile, this situation not only appeared in the African American students, in the countries all over the world are found in the phenomenon, being stigmatized group study result is terrible, often can appear high dropout rates [21]. According to Gale & Dorsey's study in 2020 [22] on racism in schools, there is a more vital link between racism in schools and persistence of study. White students experience significantly less educational discrimination than minority students [19]. Students who are ridiculed by their peers and ignored by their teachers are less likely to keep studying in school, which affects their persistence. For example, Latinos' enrollment in higher education increased by 24 per cent from 2009 to 2010. Still, the graduation rate remains far below whites [23].

### **3.2. Drinking problems caused by racism**

According to the survey, 90% of black teenagers will discriminate at some point. This feeling of insecurity and discrimination will stay with them for a long time, leading to their mental health problems [5]. As the largest of the fastest-growing minority in growth between 2000 and 2010, the number of Hispanics accounted for more than 50% of the total population growth, they also experienced a series of inequality and discrimination, many college students of them will be due to the negative mental health drinking problem, at the age of 12 or more Hispanic binge drinking in the popularity rate can be achieved 24.1%, which also reflects confrontations based on racial stress and trauma. Such conflict leads to an increased risk of dropout rate [23]. Many Hispanic American college students use alcohol as a temporary pain reliever in the face of a stressful ethnic background. The results showed that more Hispanic students who experienced discrimination reported more severe PTSD symptoms a year later, contributing to excessive drinking [23].

### **4. How to ensure the effectiveness of race-based traumatic stress interventions**

Psychological intervention is crucial when dealing with racial trauma due to racial stress [9]. PTSD caused by racial discrimination often leaves the target feeling hurt. How to provide adequate psychological intervention for victims is a requirement for therapists. First, therapists need to be trained to accept and acknowledge the existence of such traumatic stress, followed by proper assessment and intervention of the victim [9]. At the same time, therapists should provide a suitable environment for patients to talk [24] to help victims enhance their sense of security and make it easier to talk about their experiences of racism. In addition to being aware of the history of racial trauma experienced by their clients, therapists are also aware of the potentially racist effects of racism on their clients, such as the almost invisible trauma that reminds people of color of their exclusion from mainstream society [25]. To better protect and treat trauma survivors and find appropriate treatment means, it is more important to gain the patient's trust in the therapeutic relationship. Gain the victim's trust by avoiding emotions such as denial of the patient's experience, disbelief, or blaming the victim [26] and prevent further harm to them [27]. Meanwhile, At the same time, enhanced empathy, support, recognition, and understanding of the victim's experience by the clinician can lead to better outcomes [26]. Counsellors and psychologists can help adolescents identify traumatic stress symptoms and improve their symptoms by assessing their experiences of racism and analysing their frequency [28].

### **5. Conclusion**

Racial discrimination is a social problem. In the face of increasing globalization, people of color and white people are more likely to live together, and the risk of marginalization is also higher. Racial discrimination can lead to self-doubt and traumatic stress, harming young people's mental health. Because of this psychological problem, the academic performance of young people of color will be affected by stereotypes and discrimination. Some marginalized teenagers turn to alcohol to escape reality to avoid confirming such perceptions and psychological pressure. However, as mentioned above, it is still complicated for people of color to obtain quality treatment due to background and cultural differences. Therefore, studying the rationality of treatment methods can also help improve the quality of psychological therapy and help teenagers better relieve psychological trauma. Analysing

and summarizing the impact of racial discrimination on teenagers of color will help promote relevant research. Through this literature, researchers can have a clearer understanding of the pain experienced by teenagers of color, which is conducive to improving the quality of psychological intervention.

## References

- [1] L. F. Berkman and I. Kawachi, *Social Epidemiology*, ProQuest Ebook Central, 2000, pp. 36–75.
- [2] D. R. Williams, Race and health: Basic questions, emerging directions, *Annals of Epidemiology* 7 (5) (1997) 322–333.
- [3] L. E. Dixon, E. Ahles and L. Marques, Treating Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in Diverse Settings: Recent Advances and Challenges for the Future, *Current Psychiatry Reports* 18 (12) (2016) 1–10.
- [4] L. Comas-Díaz and F. M. Jacobsen, Ethnocultural allodynia, *The Journal of Psychotherapy Practice and Research* 10 (4) (2001) 246–252.
- [5] R. M. Sellers et al, Racial Identity Matters: The Relationship between Racial Discrimination and Psychological Functioning in African American Adolescents, *Journal of Research on Adolescence* 16 (2) (2006) 187–216.
- [6] K. T. Ashing, M. L. Lewis and V. P. Walker, Thoughts and Response to Authority-Perpetrated, Discriminatory, and Race-Based Violence, *JAMA Pediatrics* 171 (6) (2017) 511–512.
- [7] T. Bryant-Davis, Healing Requires Recognition: The Case for Race-Based Traumatic Stress, *The Counseling Psychologist* 35 (1) (2007) 135–143.
- [8] E. B. Carlson, *Trauma assessments: A clinician's guide*. Guilford Press, 1997.
- [9] R. T. Carter, Racism and Psychological and Emotional Injury: Recognizing and Assessing Race-Based Traumatic Stress, *The Counseling Psychologist* 35 (1) (2007) 13–105.
- [10] R. G. Rumbaut, The Crucible within: Ethnic Identity, Self-Esteem, and Segmented Assimilation among Children of Immigrants, *The International Migration Review* 28 (4) (1994) 748.
- [11] C. B. Fisher, S. A. Wallace and R. E. Fenton, Discrimination Distress During Adolescence, *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 29(6) (2000) 679–695.
- [12] K. Johnson, M. Hoyer & B. Heath, Local police involved in 400 killings per year. *USA Today News*. 2014, August 15.
- [13] T. Bryant-Davis et al, The Trauma Lens of Police Violence against Racial and Ethnic Minorities: Trauma Lens of Police Violence against Ethnic Minorities, *Journal of Social Issues* 73 (4) (2017) 852–871.
- [14] R. Staggars-Hakim, The nation's unprotected children and the ghost of Mike Brown, or the impact of national police killings on the health and social development of African American boys, *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment* 26 (3-4) (2016) 390–399.
- [15] S. A. Graham-Bermann and V. Brescoll, Gender, Power, and Violence: Assessing the Family Stereotypes of the Children of Batterers, *Journal of Family Psychology* 14 (4) (2000) 600–612.
- [16] T.F. Heatherton, *The social psychology of stigma*, Guilford Press, London; New York, 2000, 1–28.
- [17] C. Reyna, Lazy, Dumb, or Industrious: When Stereotypes Convey Attribution Information in the Classroom, *Educational Psychology Review* 12 (1) (2000) 85–110.
- [18] T. A. RILEY, Stigma, Stereotypes, and Attributional Theory: A Successful Merger, *Journal of Educational Thought* 44 (2) (2010) 229–246.
- [19] C. M. Steele, A Threat in the Air: How Stereotypes Shape Intellectual Identity and Performance, *The American Psychologist* 52 (6) (1997) 613–629.

- [20] E. Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall, 1963.
- [21] J. Ogbu, The school achievement of minority children: New perspectives, The consequences of the American caste system. In U. Neisser (Ed.), Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1986, pp.126-132.
- [22] A. Gale and M. Dorsey, Does the Context of Racial Discrimination Matter for Adolescent School Outcomes? The Impact of In-School Racial Discrimination and General Racial Discrimination on Black Adolescents' Outcomes, *Race and Social Problems* 12 (2) (2020) 171–185.
- [23] H. Cheng and B. Mallinckrodt, Racial/Ethnic Discrimination, Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms, and Alcohol Problems in a Longitudinal Study of Hispanic/Latino College Students, *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 62 (1) (2015) 38–49.
- [24] L. A. Goodman et al, Training Counseling Psychologists as Social Justice Agents: Feminist and Multicultural Principles in Action, *The Counseling Psychologist* 32 (6) (2004) 793–836.
- [25] M. P. P. Root, Reconstructing the impact of trauma on personality. In L. S. Brown & M. Ballou (Eds.), *Personality and psychopathology: Feminist reappraisals*, 1992, pp. 229–265.
- [26] A. N. Alvarez, C. T. H. Liang and H. A. Neville, *The Cost of Racism for People of Color: Contextualizing Experiences of Discrimination*. (First ed.) 2016.
- [27] T. Bryant-Davis and C. Ocampo, A Therapeutic Approach to the Treatment of Racist-Incident-Based Trauma, *Journal of Emotional Abuse* 6 (4) (2006) 1–22.
- [28] E. Flores et al, Perceived Racial/Ethnic Discrimination, Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms, and Health Risk Behaviors Among Mexican American Adolescents, *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 57(3) (2010) 264–273.