

# Sticks and stones may break bones, but racism breaks spirits:

The impact of discrimination on BIPOC adolescent mental health outcomes.

**THE GIST:** Teenagers of Color (Black, Brown, Indigenous, etc.) are often the most at risk for mental illness and simultaneously receive the least amount of community support/resources. In this study we investigated whether having an “affirmed” ethnic racial identity - a.k.a. if having positive feelings about your race - could buffer the negative effects of racial discrimination on markers of mental health problems including depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, decreased happiness and chronic pain. Surprisingly, we found that there was no buffer effect and actually having an affirmed racial identity could make chronic pain and happiness levels worse, even though our models generally showed that discrimination was bad for mental health and the positive feelings were good for it. We think this means that the teens who are the most “in-the-know” and positive about their racial identity are taking the biggest hit to their mental health when people are mean and racist.

**THE TAKEAWAY:** We should still be encouraging positive feelings about racial identity for youth of color, but it’s going to take more than that to overcome the negative effects of racism on their mental and physical health. Anti-racist involvement at the community level is going to be essential. So what can you do? In your personal spheres: mentor, encourage, uplift and educate yourself (do the work!) on the issues youth of color face and widen your circle to include more diverse people. In your civic sphere: vote, fund a community center, say something when you hear a racist joke or remark in public. Kids are our future, so if we want them healthy, happy and ready to contribute to society we have to create one where they can thrive. Onward and upward my friends!