RACISM AND CHILD HEALTH
Determinants of Health

- Behavior
- Social
- Medical
- Genetic
- Physical
- Environment
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Social Determinants of Health
Racism

- Negative beliefs, attitudes, and actions resulting from categorizing individuals and/or groups based on phenotype, heritage, or culture.
  - Prejudice: Beliefs, attitudes, assumptions
  - Discrimination: Actions and behaviors
Levels of Racism

- Interpersonal
- Structural
- Internalized

See Camara Jones, AJPH 2000
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
When people are racially discriminated against, they are treated badly, not given respect, or are considered inferior because of the color of their skin, because they speak a different language or have an accent, or because they come from a different country or culture. For each of the following situations, think whether you have ever in your life felt discriminated against because of your color, language or accent, or because of your culture or country of origin, and answer the following questions.
Items (examples)

“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”
- 88% answered at least one question positively
- Average number of questions answered positively: 6/23
- 12% answered at least half of the questions (13) positively

Pachter, Bernstein, Szalacha, Garcia Coll. Health & Social Work, 2010
Racism and Child Health Literature Review

- 2009 literature review
- Only 40 papers found in medical and social science literature
  - 26: Behavioral/Mental health
  - 8: Prematurity & low birth weight
  - 6: Physical health (cardiovascular disease, metabolic disease, satisfaction with care)

Perceptions of Racism and Mental Health in Youth of Color

- National Survey of American Life
  - 1170 African American & Afro Caribbean youth, ages 13-17
  - 85% had experiences with discrimination
Experience with Discrimination Associated with:

- Major Depression within the last 12 months
- Anxiety within last 12 months as well as lifetime
- Lifetime social phobia
All papers were published in the last 14 years (70% since 2003)

Most studied teens and older children
- 9 studies included elementary/middle school kids (only 1 included 1-3 graders)

28/37 (76%) were conducted with African American samples
- Few studies with Latinos or other children of color
Lit Review

- No standardized approach to measuring racism
  - 30 different instruments/questionnaires
  - Only 10 studies used instruments that were developed/standardized on children.
Frameworks for Investigating Racism and Child Health

- Biopsychosocial model
- Ecobiodevelopmental model
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- Ecobiodevelopmental model
  - Ecology (psychosocial and physical environment) influence biology which together drives development across the lifespan
Ecobiodevelopmental Model

- How can psychosocial factors influence biology (pathophysiology)?
  - Allostatic Load: physiological dysregulation due to chronic stress
  - Can effect multiple systems/processes
    - HPA axis
    - Inflammation
    - Hormonal regulation
    - Immunity
    - Epigenetic changes
Figure 1: Conceptual Model for How Perceived Racism Increases Disease Risk

Processing of the Social Environment

Chronic Adaptation to Social Stressors

Physiologic Dysregulation (allostatic load)

- HPA Dysregulation (cortisol)
- SMA Dysregulation (CV reactivity; arterial elasticity)

Psychological Stress

Physiological Stress

Altered Inflammation (IL-6; CRP); hormonal regulation

↑morbidity (CVD, Diabetes, Obesity, MDD, Asthma)

HEALTH DISPARITIES
The effects of racism can have health consequences both during childhood and throughout the lifecourse into adulthood.

Racism as an Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE)
ACE Study

- More Adverse Childhood Experiences (toxic stress), more adult health problems:
  - Mental health
  - Risk taking behaviors
  - Reproductive health (early pregnancy, STI)
  - Victimization
  - Physical health/chronic illness
    - Heart disease
    - Cancer
    - Stroke
    - Emphysema
    - Autoimmune disease
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Philadelphia ACE Study</th>
<th>PHL Sample (N=1,784)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Standard ACE Indicators</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Emotional abuse</td>
<td>33.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical abuse</td>
<td>35.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual abuse</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical neglect</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emotional neglect</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance using household member</td>
<td>34.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mentally ill household member</td>
<td>24.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Witnessed domestic violence</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Incarcerated household member</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Expanded ACE Indicators</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witnessed violence</td>
<td>40.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt discrimination</td>
<td>34.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsafe neighborhood</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced Bullying</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lived in foster care</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cronholm, Philadelphia ACE Task Force, 2015
Childhood Racism Exposure & Adult Health

- Depression
- Suicide attempt
- Tobacco use
- Alcohol or drug problem
- STD
- Number of sexual partners
- Unintended pregnancy
- Fractures
- Emphysema

Philadelphia ACE Task Force
Racism is a stressor that’s commonly experienced by children and youth of color.

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 can contribute to allostatic load and subsequent illness.

The illnesses that are linked to this deregulatory allostatic mechanism 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.
Resources/References

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- Jones CP. Levels of racism: a theoretic framework and a gardener's tale. AJPH, 2000 August; 90(8): 1212–1215.