



Problem drinking patterns among African Americans: The impacts of reports of discrimination, perceptions of prejudice, and 'risky' coping strategies

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Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 2003; 44:408-425

This research builds on a series of recent studies that have reported independent effects of personal experiences of racial discrimination on poor mental health outcomes. We suggest that for one mental health outcome, problem drinking, discrimination experiences have an impact not only via abridged socioeconomic attainment and the frustrations associated with institutionally limited opportunity structures, but also by directly increasing the likelihood of problem drinking. Moreover, we argue that personal experiences with discrimination help to foster a set of beliefs about the utility of drinking as a means of reducing stress that in the alcohol literature is referred to as "escapist" drinking. Escapist drinking is proposed as an intervening mechanism that is associated with a higher probability of alcohol-related mental health problems. Using data from the 1999-2000 National Survey of Black Workers, we find that, independent of socioeconomic attainment, personal reports of discriminatory experiences have direct influences on problem drinking. Consistent with our hypotheses, we also find that the effects of personal reports of discrimination are at least partially mediated by the endorsement of beliefs that drinking provides an effective coping mechanism. We conclude that racial impacts on mental health outcomes reflect more than the "simple" effects of constrained socioeconomic attainment.