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Journal of the National Medical Association

Volume 107, Issue 2, June 2015, Pages 39-45

ORIGINAL COMMUNICATION

Headache in African Americans: An Overlooked Disparity

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[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0027-9684\(15\)30023-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0027-9684(15)30023-7)

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Purpose

The persistence of health disparities in the U.S. has necessitated additional research on race-related health disparities among Americans. Remarkably little research has examined race differences in persons with headache disorders, even though 45 million Americans experience episodic or chronic headaches annually. This review paper examined peer-reviewed publication to examine potential race differences in persons with headache disorders in the areas of headache epidemiology, headache characteristics, psychiatric comorbidity, treatment utilization, and treatment outcomes.

Procedures

A multi-database search (PubMed, Web of Science, PsychINFO) identified U.S. studies that enrolled racially diverse samples of persons with headache disorders and qualitatively examined potential race-related disparities.

Main Findings

Compared to their Caucasian counterparts, African American headache patients are more likely to (i) be diagnosed with comorbid depressive disorders; (ii) report headaches that are more frequent and severe in nature, (iii) have their headaches under-diagnosed and/or undertreated; and (iv) discontinue treatment prematurely, regardless of socioeconomic status.

Principal Conclusions

State of the science treatments for chronic headaches are efficacious; unfortunately, race-related disparities prevent African American headache patients from benefiting from these treatments. Research is needed that enables African Americans with severe headaches to access current headache treatments to alleviate headache burden on the African American community.

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Keywords

Headache; Race; Health Disparities; African Americans; Ethnicity

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