OLDER BLACK AMERICANS AND DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Black Americans have experienced multiple health threats during the COVID-19 pandemic, including greater risk of infection compared to Whites. In addition, older adults are more susceptible to worse disease consequences including hospitalization and mortality compared to those who are younger. Racism and economic costs are additional public health crises during this time that have disproportionately impacted Black Americans. Using data from the Uncovering COVID-19 Experiences and Realities (UnCOVER) Study, we examined depressive symptoms in relation to: (1) worry/fear of COVID-19; (2) work loss among household members (being laid off, reduced work hours); and (3) vicarious racism, a particularly salient source of psychosocial stress during the COVID-19 pandemic, including hearing about or seeing acts of racism committed against other race group members. Participants were Black Americans aged 50 years or older (n=300) from five cities (Atlanta, Chicago, Los Angeles, New Orleans, and New York) from May-July 2020. Depression was assessed using the Patient-Reported Outcomes Measurement Information System Short Form. In multivariable linear regression models, all three public health threats were significantly associated with depressive symptoms. When in the model simultaneously, worry/fear of COVID-19 (b=0.30, SE=0.12, p<0.01) and vicarious racism (b=0.62, SE=0.15, p=0.001) showed positive associations; work loss was no longer statistically significant (b=0.62, SE=0.43, p=0.15). When added, the corresponding three-way interaction term was significant (b=0.12, SE=0.04, p=0.01). Synergetic epidemics ("syndemics") among older Black Americans amplify mental health tolls. Multi-pronged public health strategies are required to address depression in this population.

PERCEIVED EVERYDAY DISCRIMINATION AND C-REACTIVE PROTEIN INFLUENCE ON COGNITION OF OLDER BLACK ADULTS

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Black adults and women are more likely to experience serious cognitive decline in older age than their white and male counterparts. Evidence suggests perceived discrimination is associated with poor cognition in older adults, though the mechanisms remain unclear. Perceived discrimination has been linked to elevated inflammatory markers, such as C-reactive protein (CRP), which increases risk for worse cognitive functioning. Yet, little research has investigated whether CRP is implicated in the association between discrimination and cognition among Black older adults or if this relationship differs by gender. Using 2006-2016 data from Black adults ≥65 years old (N=1343) in the nationally representative Health and Retirement Study, random effects linear regression models (1) tested the association between discrimination and cognitive functioning; (2) explored whether this relationship differed for women and men; and (3) assessed whether elevated CRP mediated the association between discrimination and cognitive functioning. More frequent discrimination was associated with worse cognitive functioning (b= -0.24, SE=0.11, p<0.05), though gender did not moderate this relationship. Elevated CRP was significantly associated with worse cognitive functioning (b= 0.40, SE=0.18, p<0.05). Discrimination remained statistically significant in this model, indicating no mediation by CRP. Of note, inclusion of depressive symptoms and cardiometabolic conditions accounted for the association between both discrimination and CRP with cognitive functioning. These findings demonstrate the need for more within-group research on older Black adults documenting the complex relationship between discrimination, inflammation, and cognitive health. This approach will provide greater understanding of the biopsychosocial mechanisms underlying disparities in cognitive functioning in Black adults.

PERCEIVED NEIGHBORHOOD DISORDER, SOCIAL COHESION, AND DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS AMONG SPOUSAL CAREGIVERS

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Most prior research on caregivers' mental health focused on individual or household factors, we know much less about the influence of neighborhood factors on mental health of spousal caregivers. The current study fills the gap in our knowledge by examining the association of neighborhood characteristics (i.e., perceived neighborhood disorder and neighborhood social cohesion) and depressive symptoms among spousal caregivers. We used data from 2006 to 2016 waves of the Health and Retirement Study, which includes 2,362 spousal caregivers. Negative binomial regression models were estimated to examine the association of perceived neighborhood disorder and neighborhood social cohesion with depressive symptoms. A greater perceived neighborhood disorder was associated with higher CES-D scores, which indicates more depressive symptoms. On the other hand, a higher level of neighborhood social cohesion was associated with lower CES-D scores. When they were included in the same model, the association between neighborhood disorder and depression disappeared, while respondents who reported higher levels of neighborhood social cohesion continue to exhibit lower CES-D scores than those lived in less cohesive neighborhoods. This study highlights the importance of neighborhood contexts in understanding caregivers’ well-being. Findings of this study suggest that neighborhood social cohesion may attenuate the negative effects of neighborhood disorder. Therefore, enhancing positive characteristics of the neighborhood may promote well-being of spousal caregivers.

PERCEPTIONS OF MEDICAL CANNABIS PACKAGING AND LABELING AMONG MIDDLE-AGED AND OLDER CANADIANS

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The use of cannabis for therapeutic purposes is becoming more popular in many countries, including the United States and Canada. In Canada, middle-aged and older adults make up the largest proportion of medical cannabis users. Canadian legislation mandates that medical cannabis be packaged in plain-looking containers with small labels, childproof caps, and required health warnings. This is meant to standardize the way cannabis products are distributed, as well as protect children from accidental ingestion. However, there is limited research on how these regulations affect cannabis users over age 45. In the present study, residents of Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada aged 45 and older (n=40) were surveyed regarding their experiences with medical cannabis packaging and labeling. Half of the participants (50%) felt they had a hard time opening their medical cannabis container. A majority (60%) thought having an easy-open lid would be helpful. Most participants (78%) reported experiencing difficulties reading the label on their container, and 75% thought it would be helpful to have a printout of the label in a larger font. In addition, 89% of participants who took more than one kind of medical cannabis favored a symbol on their medication bottle that would indicate the type of medical cannabis contained inside. Implications for policy makers and future research are discussed.

PERCEPTIONS OF PARTNER COGNITIVE ABILITY DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC
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Media reports provide anecdotal evidence of increased forgetfulness during the COVID-19 pandemic (Cushing, 2021; Purtill, 2020). Scientific evidence suggests social isolation can impact on cognition (Evans et al., 2018), but the question remains whether those living with a partner experience similar deficits. The present study examined whether middle-aged and older adults’ perceptions of their own and their partner’s memory abilities were related to self-reported impact of the pandemic on daily life (e.g., limited social interactions, delayed health care, and disruption to routine). In a sample of 80 married individuals (49% female; age range 40-86 years), we found that participants’ beliefs about the impact of the pandemic on daily life and their depression ratings significantly predicted (p<0.05) their perceptions of their partner’s prospective memory abilities. Specifically, pandemic impact on daily life predicted 9.3% of the variance in participants’ reported perceptions of their partners’ prospective memory abilities, and participant depression ratings predicted an additional 5.1% of the variance. Surprisingly, these variables did not predict perceptions of participants’ own cognition or perceptions of partners’ retrospective memory abilities. In sum, people who reported greater impact of the pandemic on their lives were more likely to believe that their partner frequently forgot to carryout prospective memory intentions (e.g., failed to pass along a message or take medication), and depression further clouded their perception of their partner’s cognition. These findings should be extended to consider relationship quality and whether individuals consider their partners a reliable source of external memory support during times of life disruption.

PERCEPTIONS ON OWN AGING: COMPARISONS BETWEEN YOUNG ADULTS WITH AND WITHOUT CAREGIVING EXPERIENCE
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Although informal caregiving for older adults (OAs) can increase knowledge and awareness about one’s own aging (Pope, 2013), it can also negatively impact caregivers’ physical health and emotional wellbeing (AARP & NAC, 2020) and have spillover effects on school, work, and marriage (Dellmann-Jenkins & Blankemeyer, 2009). Despite the recent trend of family caregiving for OAs by young adults (YAs), research about these young caregivers is scarce. The present study focused on YAs’ perceptions on aging. We hypothesized that YAs who provided at least three months of caregiving tasks for OAs would hold more awareness and negative perceptions on their own aging, as measured by a modified version of the Brief Aging Perceptions Questionnaire (Sexton et al., 2014), compared to those who did not. We recruited 234 YAs between the ages of 18 - 40 (Mage = 29.78, SD, age = 4.83; 59% White; 65.4% male) and had them complete a survey via Amazon Mechanical Turks. About one third (32.1%) had caregiving experience. Results of independent t-tests revealed that caregivers scored higher on awareness of aging [t(229) = 6.950, p < .001, d = .865] and negative consequences/control [t(231) = 6.528, p < .001, d = .927]. Scores of positive consequences/control did not differ between the two groups. Our findings indicate the need for psychological interventions designed to help young caregivers integrate their caregiving experiences with less negative aging perceptions. Future research should examine the direct effects of caregiving experience on perceptions of aging between young and middle-aged adults.

PHASE 2B STUDY OF AN AD26.RSV.PREF VACCINE FOR PREVENTION OF RSV-MEDIATED RESPIRATORY TRACT DISEASE IN OLDER ADULTS
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