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## **Feeling Unfairly Treated Damages Women’s Health**

Bigotry may take a toll on the body: Women in their 40s who feel the sting of discrimination are much more likely than other women to develop dangerous “time bomb” symptoms of poor health, a large federal study shows. The report on more than 2,000 racially diverse mid-life women followed for about 14 years is in the January issue of *Psychosomatic Medicine*, journal of the American Psychosomatic Society.

Participants at the start filled out a questionnaire asking if they’d been treated unfairly in any of 10 ways, and, if so, how often it happened. The Everyday Discrimination Scale includes items like being treated with less respect than others are, people acting as if they think you’re not smart or they’re better than you, and being harassed or threatened.

The more unfair treatments women reported, and the more often it happened, the more likely they were to develop Metabolic Syndrome (MetS) 14 years later. Those who felt discrimination were 33% more likely to have developed MetS when they didn’t have it 14 years earlier. MetS is a cluster of harmful symptoms—high blood pressure and blood sugar, abnormal cholesterol and triglyceride levels, too much fat around the waist—that increases the risk of death for women after menopause.

In the new study, feelings of discrimination had the strongest link with MetS for black, Hispanic and Japanese women. Black and Japanese women who attributed the unfair treatment to their race were particularly vulnerable to MetS. Even after taking account of other known risk factors for MetS, such as smoking and physical activity, reports of discrimination independently predicted development of the unhealthy symptoms.

“What this suggests is that women who feel they’re treated unfairly pay a physiological cost,” says senior author Karen A. Matthews, Ph.D. “Perceptions of unfair treatment do have a downstream effect on women’s health.” Matthews is Distinguished Professor of Psychiatry, Professor of Epidemiology, Psychology & Clinical and Translational Science at University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine. Coauthor of the study is Danielle Beatty Moody, Ph.D. Assistant Professor of Psychology, University of Maryland, Baltimore County.

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