

Structural Racism and Oral Health Inequities of Black vs. non-Hispanic White Adults in the U.S.

Abstract: Structural racism negatively affects the health of Black populations in the U.S. Black populations experience a higher burden of oral diseases, such as tooth decay, periodontal disease, and oral and pharyngeal cancers than other racial groups experience. Oral health literature refers to racial inequities in the context of social disadvantage. However, structural racism perpetuates those contributory social disadvantages, such as inadequate access to affordable housing, education, and employment. In addition, in states where nearly 50% of U.S. Black populations reside, there is an inequitable distribution of adult Medicaid dental benefits as well as an inequitable availability of both Black and non-Black oral health care providers. Addressing structural racism in oral health should involve commitment among stakeholders to establish awareness and equity through community-building, policy, oral health workforce development, and research.

Key words: Racism, oral health, African Americans, health inequities.