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Study Shows Racial Disparities in Completion of Substance Abuse Treatment

Black and Hispanic patients who enter publicly funded alcohol and drug treatment programs are less likely to complete treatment, compared with white patients, a new study finds.

The disparities are likely related to greater unemployment rates and housing instability for black and Hispanic patients, according to the researchers.

The study found about half of all black and Hispanic patients who entered publicly funded alcohol treatment programs do not complete treatment, compared with 62 percent of white patients.

Similar disparities were found for drug treatment programs, ScienceDaily reports. The researchers analyzed data from more than one million discharges from substance abuse treatment programs.

The researchers write in Health Affairs that funding for integrated services and increased Medicaid coverage under the Affordable Care Act could help improve minorities' access to treatment programs.

"Our findings show troubling racial disparities in the completion of alcohol and drug abuse programs, and they point specifically to socioeconomic barriers that make it difficult for minority groups to access and sustain treatment," researcher Brendan Saloner, PhD, of the University of Pennsylvania, said in a news release.

"For example, in both alcohol and drug treatment groups, black and Hispanic patients were more likely than white patients to be homeless. But, disparities among the groups were found to be lower in residential treatment settings, indicating that access to residential treatment could be particularly valuable for these patients."

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