Abstract

Racial disparities in physical and mental health are ongoing and well-documented problems in the United States. Black Americans, compared to White Americans, have higher risk of obesity, heart disease, cancer, depression, and substance abuse. Research suggests prejudice and discrimination play a role in racial health disparities. Everyday discrimination is considered a chronic, psychosocial stressor that impacts the health of Black Americans. A biopsychosocial approach states there are various factors that contribute to the pathway from discrimination to disease and proposes complex relationships that explain effects of racial discrimination on health. The current study examined social factors (race-related media), biological factors (cortisol and dehydroepiandrosterone [DHEA]), and psychological factors (individual differences) in order to understand the interplay of multiple pathways from discrimination to disease. Participants \( N = 48 \) completed an online questionnaire that assessed individual difference variables and experiences with race-related media. Then participants completed an in-lab study that measured baseline levels of cortisol and DHEA, and finally, participants completed a three day at-home longitudinal portion to assess the diurnal rhythms of cortisol and DHEA and daily exposure to positive and negative race-related media. Contrary to hypotheses, results indicated that baseline levels of cortisol and DHEA were significantly correlated among participants with frequent exposure to negative race-related media, but not among participants with frequent exposure to positive race-related media. Further, cortisol and DHEA diurnal slopes were significantly correlated and the cortisol and DHEA awakening responses were significantly correlated among both participants reporting frequent exposure to negative race-related media and among participants reporting frequent exposure to positive race-related media. Results also indicated trait levels of optimism, perceived control, and racial identity may be protective factors against daily race-related stress from media. However, results indicated there were no differences in biological outcomes (cortisol and DEHA diurnal rhythms) between the two groups, but that participants reporting frequent daily exposure to negative race-related media had less daily positive affect than those reporting frequent daily exposure to positive race-related media. Results suggest negative race-related media may be a source of stress for Black Americans, thus contributing to racial health disparities.