

ABSTRACT

The evidence demonstrating that experiences of racial/ethnic discrimination is detrimental to the mental health of racial/ethnic minority youth is unequivocal. What remains unclear, however, is whether racial/ethnic discrimination increases vulnerability for suicidal thoughts and behaviors in particular, and if so, what are the underlying mechanisms to explain this relation. Drawing upon the Race-based Traumatic Stress Theory (Carter, 2007), which suggests that some individuals may experience racial/ethnic discrimination as a traumatic stressor, and thus, eliciting a traumatic stress response, the present study examined posttraumatic stress reactions (i.e., posttraumatic stress, depression, dissociation, stress sensitivity) as mediators in the relation between racial/ethnic discrimination and suicidal thoughts and behaviors among emerging adults, and whether this relation was modified by sex and race/ethnicity. Findings suggest that posttraumatic stress and depression mediate the relation between racial/ethnic discrimination stress and suicidal ideation among racial/ethnic minority emerging adults, particularly females. Additionally, increased frequency in racial/ethnic discrimination was associated with increases in suicide attempts to the degree that it increased dissociation, stress sensitivity depression, and suicidal ideation. The findings indicate that racial/ethnic discrimination may increase risk for suicidal thoughts and behaviors among racial/ethnic minority emerging adults to the degree that it elicits traumatic stress reactions, and this may vary across race/ethnicity and sex. Racial/ethnic discrimination experiences should be accounted for when assessing and treating racial/ethnic minority youth at risk for suicide.