

Occupational segregation and racial health disparities

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Objectives: Patterns of racial segregation in jobs are as yet unexamined as a potential mechanism linking occupation with health outcomes.

Methods: Using National Center for Health Statistics' (NCHS) National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) data for years 1986-1994, a segregation index (IAA) was created for each occupation, representing the percentage of African Americans in the particular occupational group. A correlation matrix, multivariable logistic regression, and occupational group rankings, were utilized to examine the association between IAA and subjective health.

Results: There was a negative correlation between IAA and the variables subjective health (-0.66), income (-0.59), and education (-0.47).

There was a consistent, positive association between IAA and poor health, regardless of adjustment for age, education, income, race, or gender (range: OR 1.021 [95% CI 1.015, 1.028] to OR 1.041 [95% CI 1.039, 1.043]).

The occupational groups with the worst subjective health ratings had the highest IAA values (Private household cleaners and servants; Maids and housemen; Laundering and dry cleaning machine operators; and Nursing aids, orderlies, and attendants). Concomitantly, the two occupational groups with the best subject health ratings had low values of IAA (Dentists, and Airplane pilots and navigators).

Discussion: IAA among US worker occupations was associated with increased reporting of poor health. Occupational segregation may be an important factor associated with the health risks of particular occupations.