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**Associations between Occupational Stress Factors and Physical/Mental
Well-Being among African American and Latino Faculty¹**

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U.S. universities can be viewed as employment sites that represent serious occupational hazards or toxic environments. In fact a significant body of literature indicates that higher education is not immune from the inequities that plague the rest of American society. The United States continues to be a nation profoundly marked by racial, gender and economic inequality. Despite this evidence of persistent inequality, the belief in meritocracy and the narrative of upward mobility through hard work and self-sacrifice continue to serve as defining national myths² with universities the perfect testing laboratory.

What do we know?

- ❖ Not surprisingly, the percentages of underrepresented minority (URM) African American (5%), Latino (3.6%), and Native American (0.4%) faculty are well below the parity of the total population of all professoriate in degree-granting institutions, especially research intensive universities.
- ❖ Despite the attention focused on the importance of diversifying the professoriate on racial/ethnic dimensions, the evidence of the continued disproportionate representation of URM faculty in the academy is clear.
- ❖ Occupational stress is a growing concern that manifests itself in stress-related disorders (both physical and mental), poor work performance, reduced productivity and retention of qualified employees in the workforce.
- ❖ Underrepresented and first generation college students and faculty report higher rates of stress, anxiety and depression due to racism and microaggressions and higher rates of physical symptoms such as high blood pressure compared to Whites.
- ❖ Despite the existing wealth of information that connects racism and discrimination to ill health effects, multiple gaps in our knowledge concerning the relationship between occupational stressors and physical/mental well-being for URM remain.

Study methods:

Using mixed-methods (interviews, focus groups and short surveys) data were collected to examine the associations among occupational stress, coping strategies and physical and mental well-being among U.S. born Assistant and Associate URM faculty (African American, Mexican American, Puerto Rican and Native American/American Indian). We obtained demographic information, occupational stress indicators (perceived racism, mentoring adequacy, self-reported health status, psychological stress and coping strategies).

This study contributes to the body of literature focused on occupational stress, including barriers to retention, progress, and their impact on success and health among URM faculty, and extends this literature to capture the experiences of a segment of the current domestic work force that is vital to strengthening our higher education institutions, decreasing social and economic inequality of communities, and strengthening the education of future cohorts of diverse students. Qualitative empirical data, allowed us to focus on personal stories, which are particularly important in the investigation of the impact of social hierarchies on the health of URM faculty in the United States.

Sample Characteristics by Race, Ethnicity and Gender

	African American		Mexican Origin		Puerto Rican	
	Male N=9 (%)	Female N=14 (%)	Male N=9 (%)	Female N=12 (%)	Male N=7 (%)	Female N=7 (%)
Age (M,SD)	37.7(3.08)	41.7(6.32)	42.4(10.58)	39.8(9.54)	42.3(6.42)	44.1(11.63)
Marital Status						
Never Married	4(44.4)	5(35.7)	2(22.2)	2(16.7)	--	1(14.3)
Married/Living with Partner	5(55.6)	9(64.3)	7(77.8)	7(58.3)	7(100.0)	4(57.1)
Divorced	--	--	--	3(25.0)	--	2(28.6)
Has Children						
Yes	5(55.6)	8(57.1)	4(44.4)	5(41.7)	4(57.1)	5(71.4)
No	4(44.4)	6(42.9)	5(55.6)	7(58.3)	3(42.9)	2(28.6)

OCCUPATIONAL STRESSORS

- Job stress may have detrimental consequences on physical and mental well-being.
- Consistent and direct relationship between occupational stress and perceptions of prejudice and discrimination.
- Predictors of stress are promotion concerns, time constraints and overall stress.

Academic Environment and Diversity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Low numbers of URM in universities-tokenism ▪ Hostile and unwelcoming climate ▪ Low valuing of community connection and research topics ▪ High racial/ethnic “Tax” burden 	Mentoring <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Low perceived support of senior mentors ▪ Few mentors who know their research area ▪ Need to develop patchwork of mentors ▪ 49% report that inadequate mentoring has significantly/somewhat impeded their career growth
Perceived Racism and Discrimination <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Subtle, intangible, can’t name ▪ Overt, blatant ▪ African American males and Mexican American females are most likely to report race discrimination and to report being extremely/very upset 	Coping Strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Confrontation ▪ Intentional Ignoring ▪ Staying Below the Radar ▪ Resignation

Physical/Mental Well-Being Findings

- Participants reported: depression, anxiety, ulcers/GERD, migraines, asthma, and shingles, and high levels of stress and anxiety associated with sleeping problems and stress-related disorders.
- Overall, a greater proportion of women (27.3%) met criteria for depression (CESD score of ≥ 7) than men (4.2%), ($p < .05$). Moreover, a greater proportion of African American women (35.7%) met criteria for depression (CESD score of ≥ 7) than Puerto Rican (14.3%) and Mexican American (8.35%) women.
- Overall, a greater proportion of men (72%) reported their health as excellent or very good compared to women (66.7%), across all ethnic groups.

Contributions

- These findings can serve to shed light on academic stress factors that may contribute to low retention and less favorable health status for those in academic workplaces, especially URM faculty.

¹Funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Understanding the Relationship between Work Stress and US Research Institutions’ Failure to Retain Underrepresented Minority (URM) Faculty.

²Harris, Angela P. & González, Carmen G. (2012). Introduction. In Gutiérrez y Muhs, Gabriella, Niemann, Yolanda F., Gonzalez, Carmen G., & Harris, Angela P. (eds.), *Presumed Incompetent: The intersections of race and class for women in academia*. (pp. 1- 16). Boulder, Colorado: Utah State University Press.