Racial discrimination has been studied as a possible reason for the health disparities reported between races and ethnicities. Research has shown more than 100 studies that link racial discrimination to physical health for African Americans/Blacks, Asians, and Hispanics. Some studies found a relationship between discrimination and delays in obtaining medical tests, mammography screening, and Pap tests; however, some research has found mixed results concerning the use of preventive health services. The perception of racial discrimination has also been associated with high levels of stress, mental health problems, and increased utilization of mental health treatment when racial identity was not controlled.

This report examined the impact of racial discrimination on health behaviors and mental health problems, and on the need and utilization of psychological treatment among California women. In 2009, 4,924 respondents to the California Women’s Health Survey were asked: Have you ever experienced discrimination because of your race or ethnicity? Regarding mental health needs, women were asked whether they had felt overwhelmed and whether they wanted help to deal with problems (and if so, if they had gotten help). To assess health behaviors, women were asked within how many years they had their last routine check-up; and if they had ever had a Pap test, mammogram; or hysterectomy. Responses were weighted in these analyses by age and race/ethnicity to reflect the 2000 California adult female population. Differences between groups were evaluated using Chi square statistics.

**Highlights**
- Nearly one fifth of women ages 18 and above reported ever experiencing racial discrimination (19.9 percent, N = 771).
- Women who reported that they very often felt overwhelmed in the previous 30 days noted more racial discrimination (40.7 percent) than women who often felt overwhelmed (31.3 percent); sometimes felt overwhelmed (24.0 percent); rarely felt overwhelmed (23.9 percent); or never felt overwhelmed (18.0 percent; \( P < .0001 \)) (Figure 1).
- Among women who reported feeling overwhelmed, those who noted wanting help for their problems reported higher rates of racial discrimination (32.1 percent) than women who did not want help (19.4 percent; \( P < .0001 \)) (Figure 1).
- Among women who wanted help dealing with their problems, those who did not get help reported more racial discrimination (38.8 percent) than women who got the help they needed (29.0 percent; \( P < .05 \)) (Figure 1).
- Women who said they had not had a hysterectomy reported higher rates of racial discrimination (23.4 percent) than women who reported having had a hysterectomy (19.2 percent; \( P < .01 \)) (Figure 2).

**Public Health Message:**
For California women, higher rates of discrimination are associated with feeling overwhelmed and a need for mental health treatment. However, those who reported more discrimination also noted obtaining less mental health treatment, even though they indicated wanting treatment. Women could benefit from interventions that address the role discrimination can play in their mental health and their lack of mental health treatment.
No significant difference was found in women who experienced racial discrimination based on timing of last routine check-up or having ever had a Pap test or mammogram.

Figure 1

Racial Discrimination Rates of California Women by Feeling Overwhelmed, * Wanting Help, ** and Whether They Got Help, ** 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feeling Overwhelmed in Past 30 days</th>
<th>Wanted Psychological Help</th>
<th>Got Psychological Help</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Often</td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>38.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>29.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>32.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* P < .05, ** P < .0001

Source: California Women’s Health Survey, 2009
**The Relationship of Racial Discrimination to Health Behaviors and Mental Health of California Women, 2009**

Department of Health Care Services
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**Figure 2**

Racial Discrimination Rates for California Women by History of Having a Hysterectomy,* 2009

* * P < .01
Source: California Women’s Health Survey, 2009

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