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US study highlights earnings gap among black and white male physicians

*And finds female physicians earn significantly less than either white or black male colleagues*

White male physicians in the United States earn substantially more than black male physicians, even after accounting for factors such as medical specialty, experience, and hours worked, finds a study published by *The BMJ* today.

The results also show that, while incomes of black and white female physicians are similar to each other, they are significantly lower than their male counterparts.

National estimates of differences in annual income between black and white physicians in the US are limited, despite overwhelming evidence that black people earn less than white people in the overall US economy.

So a team of researchers, led by Ruth L. Newhouse, Associate Professor Anupam Jena at Harvard Medical School, set out to estimate differences in income by race and sex among US physicians.

They used recent data from two nationally representative surveys - the 2000-13 American Community Survey (ACS) and the 2000-08 Center for Studying Health System Change (HSC) physician survey.

Annual income was adjusted for several factors from both surveys, including age, specialty, hours worked, years in practice, and percentage of revenue from social insurance schemes Medicare and Medicaid.

Results show that white male physicians had a higher median annual income than black male physicians. For example, in the 2010-13 ACS survey, white male physicians had an adjusted median annual income of $253,042 compared with $188,230 for black male physicians - nearly 35% greater median income among white male physicians.

And while white and black female physicians earned similar incomes to each other, they were significantly lower than their male counterparts (adjusted median annual income of $163,234 for white female physicians compared with $152,784 for black female physicians).

As with any observational study, no firm conclusions can be drawn about cause and effect. The authors also point to some study limitations, but say their findings "highlight large disparities in income between white and black male physicians, and even larger disparities between male and female physicians."

They argue that race and sex based disparities in earnings potential "cannot be closed simply by opening up opportunities for minorities and women in higher paying specialties" and say "efforts to eliminate these disparities might need to look beyond medical school admissions and training to the broader workplace."

And they call for further study "to understand the etiology of these race and sex differences and whether they stem from disparities in job opportunity or other factors."

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