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Unpacking the Effects of Stress and Discrimination on Substance Use: Similarities and Differences Among Latino, Black, and Multi-Racial/Ethnic Young Men Who Have Sex with Men

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Abstract Summary : Background: For young men of color who have sex with men [YMCSM], substance use disparities become especially apparent when minority stress (e.g., stressful life events, racism, homophobia) is considered. YMCSM may experience discrimination targeting both their race/ethnicity and sexual identities, however, it remains unclear which minority-stressors contribute to substance use and whether these pathways are variant between racial/ethnic groups. Therefore, we investigated associations of stressful life events and discrimination with substance use and moderation by race/ethnicity. Methods: The sample (n=448) included Latino (58.9%), Black (21.0%), and Multi-Racial/Ethnic (20.1%) YMCSM aged 16 to 24. Participants reported number of stressful life events (e.g., family conflict, HIV diagnosis) in the last six months and frequency of discrimination (i.e., sexualized and institutional racism, harassment and shaming homophobia). Race/ethnicity was dummy coded to compare Black and Multi-Race/Ethnicity to Latino participants. Modified Poisson regression with robust error variance was used to estimate prevalence rates of past six-month and lifetime use of alcohol, marijuana, tobacco, cocaine, poppers, and other drugs. Results: Total number of stressful life events was associated with prevalence of past six-month use of alcohol (prevalence ratio [PR]: 1.047), marijuana (PR: 1.077), tobacco (PR: 1.161), cocaine (PR: 1.334), poppers (PR: 1.301), and other drugs (PR: 1.195) and lifetime cocaine use (PR: 1.459). Sexualized racism was only associated with poppers use and effects were moderated by race/ethnicity. Sexualized racism was associated with greater prevalence of six-month use (PR: 1.596) for Multi-Racial/Ethnic participants and lifetime use (PR: 1.993) for Black participants. Institutional racism was associated with higher prevalence of lifetime cocaine (PR: 1.623) and poppers (PR: 1.482) use for Latino participants and higher prevalence of six-month tobacco (PR: 1.380) and other drugs use (PR: 1.368) for Multi-Race/Ethnic participants. Harassment homophobia was associated with greater prevalence of six-month tobacco (PR: 1.111) and other drugs (PR: 1.171) use, but only relative to lifetime use. This association was weaker for Black participants. Shaming homophobia was associated with greater prevalence of six-month and lifetime tobacco use for Black (PR: 1.521; PR: 1.440) and Multi-Racial/Ethnic (PR: 2.194; PR: 1.241) participants, but lower six-month (PR: 0.798) and lifetime (PR: 0.935) prevalence for Latino participants. Discussion: Results demonstrate similarities and differences between race/ethnic groups in substance use etiology among YMCSM. Stressful life events were associated with greater prevalence of all past six-month substance use across race/ethnic groups. The effects of

discrimination varied by race/ethnic group and substance. Thus, unpacking the connection between stigma-related minority stress and substance use requires investigation of differences within populations experiencing health disparities (i.e., YMCSM). For example, compared to Latino YMCSM, Black YMCSM reported lower prevalence of poppers use, yet when they experienced sexualized racism, their poppers use exceeded that of Latino participants. Researchers must account for subgroup differences when attempting to understand how different types of minority-stressors together contribute to substance use outcomes. Future research should address how YMCSM may be differentially targeted by and respond to racism and homophobia.