

A Manager's Guide to Reducing Minority Stress in the Workplace

The workplace can be a source of meaningful growth, contributions, and personal fulfillment. But it also has the potential to present daily stressors that diminish our health and relationships. In fact, four out of five employees report that workplace stress affects their interactions with friends, family, and coworkers, according to [Mental Health America's 2022 workplace report](#).

For Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), this reality can be magnified by the microaggressions, unconscious bias, and racism that still exist. Researchers categorize these experiences as minority-related stress.

The word "minority" in minority-related stress could be misleading, suggesting that this issue affects only a small percentage of the workforce. In reality, it describes the unique stressors that come with being underrepresented, isolated, and even targeted at the individual level.

In this article, we'll explore what minority-related stress is, how it shows up in the workplace, and ultimately, how everyone can help reduce it.



Andrea Holman, PhD

DEIB Program Manager for Workforce Transformation

Hi! I'm Dr. Holman. I'm a counseling psychologist at Lyra, your mental health benefit. I'm passionate about empowering and educating individuals, particularly those in marginalized communities, to utilize and benefit from mental health services both at work and at home.



Evelyn Farias, MA, EdM

DEIB Program Specialist for Workforce Transformation

Hi, I'm Evelyn! I'm a mental health therapist at Lyra, specializing in diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging initiatives. My work is centered on the promotion of mental health education and advocacy for BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ communities in the workplace.

What is minority-related stress?

Minority-related stress refers to the strain experienced by people who identify as part of a minority population—whether a racial, ethnic, gender, or sexual minority. Examples of this stress include—but aren't limited to—experiencing or even expecting prejudice, feeling pressure to conceal your sexual orientation, and dealing with internalized stigma.

Why minority-related stress affects mental health

The minority stress model, developed by social science researchers in the early 2000s, was a breakthrough in understanding how these daily demands can affect an individual's overall health.

The model suggests that people in a minority group commonly experience distinct, chronic stressors related to their identity. And it's not just the stressors that harm them but also the ongoing need to adapt to these stressors that lead to negative outcomes over time.

For instance, an employee of color may hear an insult about racial minorities. The experience in itself can be incredibly harmful, and, because the experience will likely happen over and over, having to cope with such insults on a regular basis takes up an additional emotional burden. Over time, these accumulated stressors can lead to poor mental health and deepen health disparities between majority and minority populations.

At work, minority-related stress can also create negative employment outcomes: more burnout, lower job satisfaction, employee turnover, and toxic workplaces, as noted in a [Harvard Business Review](#) column on microaggressions at work.

Did you know?

Studies published by the [American Psychiatric Association fact sheet \(551 KB, PDF\)](#) show that minorities experience about the same amount of mental health challenges as their white peers but absorb a disproportionate burden, and their disabilities are longer-lasting.

Because the minority stress model is relatively new, social science is still catching up. But this much is already clear: Minority-related stress is actively affecting employees, and modern workplaces can—and should—respond.

Reducing minority-related stress at work

Though racism and discrimination in the workplace must be dealt with on an organizational level, there's a lot you can do to take care of yourself if minority-related stress becomes a consistent challenge at work.



Think of the trifecta.

Dealing with workplace stressors, especially those related to identity, is often draining—physically, cognitively, emotionally, and spiritually. Tackling the self-care trifecta of sleep, nutrition, and exercise can be restorative.



Join a group that celebrates and affirms your identity.

Connecting with others who have similar experiences can provide relief. Your employer may offer identity-based affinity groups or an employee resource group (ERG), but you could also look outside the workplace (for example, a neighborhood club that reads books by queer authors or a group for Black parents in the same school system).



Consider how a professional can help.

A mental health expert who can directly affirm your cultural values can help you process minority stress. Research shows that discussing culture in therapy can make the experience more effective, and Lyra's diverse network of providers are available to you within two days.



How managers can support mental health for BIPOC employees

Workplace stress affects relationships with an employee's friends, family, and community. Managers are often an employee's most direct tie to their work environment, so there's a lot you can do to support members of your teams. Consider these strategies to ensure an employee experience that contributes to positive mental health outcomes. The first step to understanding and improving their experience is recognizing that it's happening, even if you have good intentions.

1 Provide safe, accessible places for voicing concerns.

Make sure everyone at your organization knows who to turn to if they have a concern about inclusion at work and how they should share information about it. Your actions and responses should convey that concerns won't be dismissed or minimized and that those who speak up will not face retaliation of any kind.

2 Ask employees what support looks like for them.

Do your part to ensure the actions you take toward a safer and more inclusive workplace are meaningful to the groups you want to support. Try reaching out to employee resource groups to understand their concerns. Host listening sessions with a third party who can facilitate feedback from employees.

3 Respond appropriately to mental health distress.

Many employers say they want their teams to be authentic at work. But these words can feel hollow if your workplace doesn't offer support to actually help employees recover from stress. When someone communicates their needs or distress, make sure you respond with a nonjudgmental perspective, and connect them with available resources.



A recent [Deloitte survey](#) found that 80 percent of employees see inclusivity in the workplace as a key criterion when choosing a job. That same survey found that “72 percent of respondents would leave or may consider leaving an organization for a more inclusive one.”

Become an advocate

You may feel frozen or unsure what to do when a colleague discloses a mental health concern, especially if it's related to an experience you don't share. A recent study by Lyra's Workforce Transformation team asked Black and Latino/a participants to define the qualities of a racial advocate. The following themes that emerged can give you a starting point for supporting teammates.



Know something and someone.

Actively invest in your own education, both about minority-related stress and about the culture of the minority group for which you wish to advocate. Develop transparent, trusting relationships with colleagues who identify as belonging to minority groups. Examine ways some of these relationships—in the workplace and beyond—may center on your culture, and seek to have a more balanced relationship.



Say and do something.

You don't need to have all the answers to offer a colleague compassion in moments of stress. You can also speak up by showing up: Support projects, cover for absences if you can, or engage in activism on an individual level. Be specific and realistic about your efforts, and only commit to what you can actually see through to the end.

Get access to the right kind of care

Lyra Health, your mental health benefit, is available for those who are interested in starting care. The Lyra network uses expert providers of many backgrounds, lived experiences, and identities.

[Learn more about Lyra, today](#)