This study investigates whether the experience of discrimination among immigrants in Germany affects their mental and physical health.

In many countries, immigrants are discriminated against by members of the majority population, which may contribute to the emergence of health inequalities between immigrants and the majority population. Our study examines a.) whether perceptions of discrimination predict self-reported mental and physical health (SF-12), or b.) whether poor mental and physical health predict perceptions of discrimination, and c.) whether discrimination effects physical health via mental health.

Data on foreign born immigrants come from the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) from the years 2002 to 2010 (persons = 2,851, observations = 8,307). Results from random and fixed effects regression models indicate that perceptions of discrimination negatively affect mental and physical health. The effect of perceived discrimination on physical health is mediated by its negative effect on mental health. The analyses do not support the notion that poor mental and physical health predict the subsequent reporting of discrimination. In addition, the study shows that different immigrant groups are differentially exposed to perceived discrimination.

Differential exposure to perceived discrimination may therefore be seen as a mechanism contributing to the emergence of health inequalities in Germany.