


Black American Men and Complex Societal Educational Navigation of the Emergency Public Health Pandemic of COVID 19

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ABSTRACT

COVID-19, also known as Coronavirus, is an emergency pandemic that has an impact worldwide. In the U.S., a disturbing trend is where African Americans are experiencing a disproportionate amount of death. The US Centers for Disease Control recommends facemasks as protection from COVID-19. Many Black men feel that wearing a mask will give them the perception of being a criminal or being threatening in a non-Black community. Many Black men feel that wearing these masks will lead to racial profiling from people and police. Many Black men have a sense of anxiety about wearing a mask because they fear that it draws unwanted attention by wearing a mask in public. This paper explores this complexity through a content analysis of current events and theoretical literature. This applied research project intends to shed light on unique challenges facing people of Black American men as they attempt to navigate COVID-19.

KEYWORDS

Black Lives Matter, Coronavirus, COVID-19, Health Disparities, Microaggressions, Pandemic Planning, Stereotypes, Stigma Education

OVERVIEW

The African-Americans in the U.S. are experiencing some lopsided health impacts of COVID-19, also known as the coronavirus (Lahut, 2020). Emerging data has revealed that African-Americans makeup 13 percent of the U.S. population but represent 30 percent of the COVID 19 cases in the U.S. (Aleem, 2020). About one out of three U.S. COVID-19 deaths are African-Americans (Aleem, 2020). In the State of Wisconsin, African-Americans represent almost 40 percent of the state's COVID 19 deaths, even though they represent just six percent of the state's population (Aleem, 2020). COVID-19 has created tremendous health risks for citizens all over the world. For African-American men, navigating this pandemic has created some complex quandaries about if they should wear a mask to protect them for COVID-19 (Newton, 2020). If they do wear a mask, will they be viewed as threatening or perceived a criminal? (Newton, 2020). In order assimilate into non-African-American communities, Black men have often had to regulate their dress and appearances in ways that might make them seem

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safe but wearing a mask at night while walking or in a store, while shopping has created a level of apprehension and concern (Newton, 2020).

The complexities of African-Americans ability to navigate this pandemic have several different challenging contexts. In the U.S., of 40 people arrested for violating social distancing rules in Brooklyn, New York, 35 were Black, and only five were White, even though Blacks only represent 36% of the population in that community (Bates, 2020). The New York City police department issued 374 violations which required a summons to appear in court to individuals for acts liable to spread disease from March 16, 2020, to May 5, 2020 (Bates, 2020). Of that 374 summons, 304 Black and Hispanic people were charged (Bates, 2020).

Problem Statement

For African-American men, navigating this pandemic has created some complex quandaries about if they should wear a mask to protect them for COVID-19 (Newton, 2020). If they do wear a mask, will they be viewed as threatening or perceived a criminal? (Newton, 2020). To assimilate into non-African-American communities, Black men have often had to regulate their dress and appearances in ways that might make them seem safe but wearing a mask at night while walking or in a store. In contrast, shopping has created a level of apprehension and concern (Newton, 2020). Some examples causing concern include a police officer in Florida attempting to arrest a Black male doctor who was a public health volunteer testing homeless people for COVID-19, who was profiled as criminal (Cineas, 2020). The complexities of African-Americans ability to navigate this pandemic have several different challenging contexts. The research problem is to explore these contexts with the hope of helping those outside of minority communities better understand.

Research Method

The research approach included phenomenological qualitative research interviews to explore the lived experiences African-American men in the United States and a content analysis of the social science and social psychology literature concerning the complex challenges for African American men within the context of COVID-19.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Six U.S. senators sent a letter to the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigations and the U.S. Department of Justice requesting intervention and investigation concerning prejudicial treatment by law enforcement officers across the U.S. towards Black men concerning COVID-19 (Cineas, 2020). The U.S. senators' inquiry was based on Black men being profiled for wearing the protective masks, as recommended by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, and for being disproportionately targeted Covid-19 social distancing violations (Cineas, 2020). Out of fear, two Black men in Illinois recorded a police officer following them in a Walmart store, with his hand on his gun. One of the men said the officer told them that they were not allowed to wear their masks (Cineas, 2020).

Gabriel Felix (2020) states, "The COVID-19 pandemic is putting me in a difficult position as a physician and as a Black man. The order to wear a face mask in public has made it worse. I'm a psychiatry resident at a safety-net hospital just outside of Boston. In the last week of March, I and health care workers from other specialties were redeployed to work in the hospital's general medicine units to provide care for the surge of patients infected with COVID-19 as well as those with other medical problems. All of us, nurses, physicians, and other health care professionals had to work through obstacles as we rapidly learned new skills. We've bonded over this intense experience, sharing concerns about increased exposure to the virus that causes COVID-19, the families and friends we put at risk from our work, and what we are doing to stay healthy. I share many of the fears and anxieties of my hospital co-workers surrounding Covid-19. Yet there are some ways the pandemic affects me in ways my colleagues have trouble understanding. Take the simple act of wearing a face mask when

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