

The Impact of COVID-19 on African Americans' Health Attitudes and Information Seeking Behavior

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Abstract

- Background:** African-Americans suffer a disproportionate impact from COVID-19. We conducted a study to understand COVID-19's impact on African-Americans' trust in experts, information seeking behavior, and health attitudes.
- Methods:** In April 2020, we conducted an online survey of a national sample of 2,544 US adults on their health attitudes and behaviors before and after the COVID-19 outbreak. Comparisons were analyzed using chi-squared tests.
- Results:** Before COVID-19, African-Americans were least likely to report they had trust in science and government. After COVID-19, African-Americans' trust in science and government fell even further and remained significantly lower than the other two groups. Twice as many African-Americans (9%) vs. Caucasians (4%) stopped following science and health news altogether after COVID-19. The percentage of African-Americans who reported anxiety about their own health and their families' health rose significantly after the outbreak. Only 25% of African-Americans surveyed were confident they would get the healthcare they needed if they contracted COVID-19.
- Conclusions:** After COVID-19, African-Americans' trust in science and government fell and 9% had stopped following science and health news altogether, reducing access to important health information. African-American anxiety rose in several areas and only a minority of African-Americans agreed they would get the needed healthcare if they contracted COVID-19. These findings have implications for the mental health and behavioral impacts of COVID-19 on African-Americans and for the development of health communications to high-disease-incidence populations.

Background

- Ethnic minorities, particularly African-Americans and Hispanics, are disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 virus. African-Americans comprise about 24% of COVID-19-related deaths in the US, while only making up 13% of the population.
- We conducted a study on a diverse US population in order to understand how the virus has impacted their emotional health.
- In order to assess communication opportunities, we also assessed respondents' trust in science and government, as well as information-seeking behavior.

Objective

- To understand the impact that COVID-19 had on the emotional health of ethnic minority groups, particularly African-Americans.
- To investigate how the virus impacted attitudes about science and government.
- To assess if health information-seeking behavior changed in the wake of COVID-19.

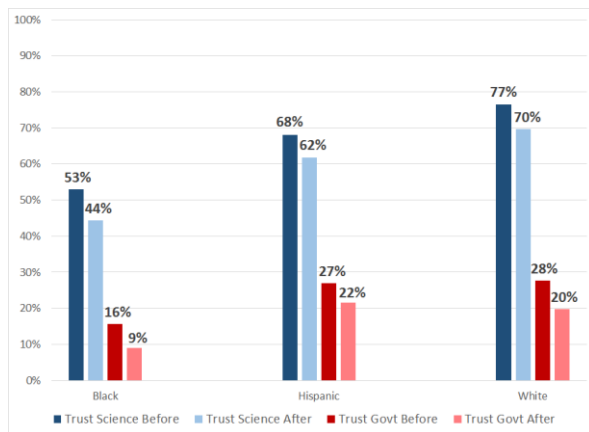
Methods

- An online survey of US residents (N=2,544) aged 18-75 years old was distributed in April 2020, after the initial COVID-19 outbreak and subsequent stay-at-home orders.
- Participants self-reported their feelings of trust in science and government, and worries about their own or their family's health, before and after the COVID-19 outbreak.
- Comparisons were analyzed using chi-squared tests.

Results

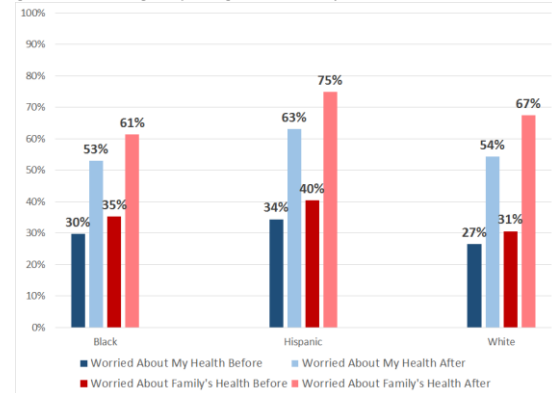
- Of the total survey respondents, N=473 identified as African-American or Black, N=282 identified as Hispanic, and N=1,799 respondents identified as non-Hispanic Whites.
- The mean ages of each racial/ethnic group were 41.4 years (SD=11.5 years), 38.0 years (SD=11.0 years), and 45.7 years (SD=12.9 years), respectively.

Figure 1. Percent Reporting Trust in Science and Government Before and After COVID-19



- Prior to the onset of COVID-19, African-Americans reported significantly less trust in science than other groups (53% vs. 68% for Hispanics and 77% for non-Hispanic Whites, $p < .01$). This was also true for trust in government (16% vs. 27% for Hispanics and 28% for non-Hispanic Whites, $p < .01$).
- After COVID-19, the percentage of African-Americans who had trust in science and government fell further to 44% ($p < .01$) and 9% ($p < .01$), respectively, and remained significantly lower than the other two groups.
- The percentage of African-Americans reporting trust in science fell more on a percentage basis after COVID-19 (17% decrease) compared to Hispanics (9% decrease) and Whites (9% decrease). Similarly, the percentage of African-Americans reporting trust in government fell more after COVID-19 (44% decrease) compared to Hispanics (19% decrease) and Whites (29% decrease).
- Additionally, twice as many African-Americans vs. Whites reported that they had stopped following health and science-related news altogether after COVID-19 (9% vs. 4%, $p < .01$).

Figure 2. Percentage Reporting Health Anxiety Before and After COVID-19 Outbreak



- The percentage of African-Americans reporting anxiety about their health rose from 30% to 53% after COVID-19 ($p < .01$), and the percentage worried about their family members' health rose from 35% to 61% ($p < .01$). A similar pattern was seen for Hispanics and Whites.
- The percentage of respondents reporting anxiety about their health or family members' health approximately doubled after COVID-19 for all 3 groups, with Hispanics having the highest percentage reporting anxiety after the COVID-19 outbreak.
- Survey respondents reported low levels of confidence in getting the healthcare they would need if they contracted COVID-19. Only 25% of Black respondents, 28% of Hispanics and 30% of Whites expressed this healthcare confidence.

Conclusions

- After the COVID-19 outbreak, African-Americans reported a significant loss of trust in both science and government, and almost 10% stopped following science and health news altogether. African-American trust in these institutions was lower than that of Hispanics and Whites even before the impact of COVID-19, and the outbreak lowered their trust still further. These changes are troubling and could have the effect of reducing African-Americans' access to important COVID-19 health information.
- The percentage of African-Americans who reported anxiety about personal or family health both increased significantly after COVID-19 compared to before the outbreak.
- Only a minority of those surveyed felt they would get the necessary healthcare if they contracted COVID-19. This lack of confidence in the healthcare system could result in patients avoiding testing and treatment, which could increase transmission and mortality.
- These findings have implications for the impacts of COVID-19 on ethnic minorities and for the development of health communications to high-disease-incidence populations.