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Racial and Ethnic Disparities: Essential Workers, Mental Health, and the Coronavirus Pandemic

It's clear that the pandemic is disproportionately impacting communities of color. In this study, we investigate mental health distress among essential workers during the Coronavirus pandemic across race and ethnicity. We evaluate individual responses to the Patient Health Questionnaire and General Anxiety Disorder Questionnaire using unique, nationally representative, data set. Our findings suggest that Black essential healthcare workers disproportionately report symptoms of anxiety; while, Latino essential health-care workers disproportionately report symptoms of depression. Additionally, we find that being a Black or Latino essential non-health care worker is associated with higher levels of distress related to anxiety and depression. These findings highlight the additional dimensions to which Black and Hispanic Americans are disproportionately being affected by the Coronavirus pandemic. Furthermore, it calls into question how essential worker classifications, compounded by US unemployment policies, is potentially amplifying the mental health trauma experienced by workers.