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COMMENTARY

# Youth Minorities Struggle with COVID-19

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## Introduction

As the world continues to battle COVID-19 as one, many young Americans have found themselves fighting a battle all alone (1). Some argued that government imposed lockdown and changes in routines may have worsened depression, and anxiety in youth minorities while others suggested mental health symptoms seemed to be reduced possibly due to the feeling of safety that being at home provided, the amount of time spent with family, and lessened academic pressure (1). However, as the lockdown went on for months, researchers confirmed that COVID-19 negatively affected and further isolated young minorities who were already suffering with mental health disorders (2). Evidence highlights how American youth, particularly youth minorities, facing socio-economic challenges and cultural factors had their mental health severely impacted (3). In many cases, this revealed the lack of communication, information and resources available to them (4). As a result, minority adolescents have become further disadvantaged and unable to perform crucial life skills due to depression, anxiety and the lack of interaction.

## Background

COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by SARS-CoV-2. This novel virus produces a respiratory disease in humans that may lead to severe disease and progression to hospitalization and even death. The first case was found in December 2019. COVID-19 greatly impacted millions across the globe but vaccinations against SARS-CoV-2 greatly reduced the risk of severe infections (5). Although disease severity has been reduced, the social impact of COVID-19 has led to suffering with depression and anxiety in many

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individuals and has exacerbated it in those already impacted. Many studies show that COVID-19 impacted the mental health of adolescents (6).

Anxiety and depression are more than just feelings; they are disorders that interfere with everyday activities. The National Institute of Mental Health says major depressive disorder or clinical depression is a common but serious mood disorder. It causes severe symptoms that affect how you feel, think, and handle daily activities, such as sleeping, eating, or working. To be diagnosed with depression, the symptoms must be present for at least two weeks (7).

COVID-19 has also led to the increase in anxiety disorders. Occasional anxiety is a normal part of life. Many people worry about things such as health, money, or family problems. But anxiety disorders involve more than temporary worry or fear. For people with an anxiety disorder, the anxiety does not go away and can get worse over time (6). COVID contributed to the decline in teens' mental health, especially in youth minorities. Youth minorities struggled an abundant amount during government lockdowns and continue to struggle even today.

## Causes

COVID-19 had a significantly negative effect on the mental health of many racial minority teens. Factors such as financial hardships, domestic abuse, marital status, lack of social interaction, racism, etc., greatly changed the way this youth group spent their time while in quarantine. These factors caused these teens to feel an extreme amount of stress, which in many circumstances led to many negative mental effects. When talking about monetary issues, domestic abuse, and marital status, all these issues connect to economic impacts caused by COVID-19. A great number of parents of minority teens lost their jobs due to COVID-19, or they weren't able to work because of fear of contracting the virus. The lack of money in households led to many parental fights which increased the rate of domestic abuse (2). However, the economic decline wasn't the only thing that led to these issues. The struggle with mental health was also greatly influenced by racism. Many of these teens were faced with discrimination from people targeting their race. There were many hate crimes targeted towards minority groups during the pandemic, which led to fear in these teens when going out into society. Many feared leaving their house and for others lockdown restrictions restrained them from doing so. This led to lack of social interaction which caused a decrease in communication skills (8).

## Latino Youth--Cultural and Social Effects

COVID-19 affected cultural norms in many ways, particularly for the Hispanic community. For instance, a popular coming of age event is the celebration of young women with a quinceanera. This is a wedding-like event that honors young girls and their contributions to society. Quinceaneras are way more than just parties; they play a vital role in a young woman's confidence to take on the challenges that life will bring. Not being able to participate in an event that has taken place for generations before can take a huge toll on young Latina women. The 15-year anticipation and planning for this tradition that is now futile for some families can really affect the mental health of these young individuals.

The Hispanic culture traditionally embraces the "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" mentally. It may be difficult for some youth and adolescents to subscribe to this way of thinking. When a minority Hispanic teenager complains or says that they are struggling with depression, the parents usually don't believe them and don't believe such disorder exists. Parents invalidate, making them alienate themselves and therefore dig the proverbial hole for their own kids even deeper. COVID-19 has only worsened this dilemma during the pandemic and after. The mental health of youth minorities is so important and more awareness can help youth develop coping mechanisms.

As an added burden, Latino children that come from immigrant families are at a heightened risk of mental health issues like depression due to the increased amount of media coverage on the deportation of children like themselves or family members. On social media, there is a mass amount of viral videos and information about the immigrant Latino community placed at the border during the pandemic. These videos included imagery of families being separated, sleeping in foil bags, and being deprived of their basic needs. The close proximity of everyone in these videos made it a COVID-19 hotspot. These videos were shown to increase depression symptoms in Latino children (11). For many, this could turn into a reality as many are undocumented and don't have stable ground.

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## Asian Youth

The mental health effects of COVID-19 affected Hispanic youth was also prevalent among American Asian youth. There was an increase in anxiety and depression within the Asian community that resulted from the fear of being racially profiled and hate crime. Hate crimes against the Asian population increased 145% in the 16 major cities in the US from 2019 to 2020. A study showed that 543 Chinese American families have faced either direct or indirect racism either in person or online (12). This shows how common it was to be racially profiled, and validates their heightened feelings of anxiety and depression.

There was a decrease in job availability regarding the Asian-owned businesses that required close contact such as beauty services. The unemployment rate for Asian Americans fell the lowest compared to other ethnicities during the Covid-19 pandemic (12). This could also be another factor affecting the youth because financial hardships caused an even greater effect on their social and emotional health.

## Management

COVID-19 has brought great stress among the people of the United States and as we slowly start returning to our everyday life we see that a lot of people are left with mental health issues due to the lockdown. Just like every other disease or illness, mental health should also be treated as soon as possible. When it comes to minorities such as Asians, Hispanics, and African Americans, it can be difficult to access these treatments. However, out of all the minorities listed previously, Hispanics have the lowest rates of medical insurance in the United States, which shows just how hard it is for Hispanics to access healthcare (13). This not only makes it nearly impossible for these groups to get mental health but also exacerbates the spread of SARS-CoV-2 as many of them don't get the opportunity to get tested or go to the doctor. Something that can be done to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in a community is by making COVID testing and care accessible and equal for everyone. Other things that can be done to manage stress is to communicate with other people such as neighbors, classmates, counselors and healthcare professionals at schools so that they are able to create a feeling of security and would furthermore help lower the risk of depression (14).

## Aftermath

The COVID-19 pandemic has left a significant impact on the youth minorities and how they are struggling in everyday life. From social to domestic abuse, racism to financial hardship, and marital status to stress. All this forever alters the way the youth is living their lives and how they should be taking care of themselves. Some struggle on where to look for healthcare being available, and even reaching out to those in fear of being assaulted or racially profiled. They are expected to get straight back to how they were living before, which contributes to even more stress. All these public problems have a domino effect on each other leaving our youth scared and their mental health affected. This is not a gradual problem, but rather an emergency call for the future of the development and safety of children. Due to the prolonged lockdowns of the U.S. There are many neurological developments being impaired in young generations (14). Not only is it affecting their development, it is also affecting their economic status that may lead to some falling into poverty, again exacerbating their health and social challenges. Children are trying to catch up to the world's expectations despite extreme isolation that COVID - 19 induced, leaving youth to hastily gain critical life skills and hopefully make a healthy transition into adulthood.

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