

Black and Essential – Coping Strategies and Narratives of Black Baton Rouge, Louisiana Residents During Covid-19



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Executive Summary
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The following summary is a collaboration between Dr. David Stamps (primary investigator), E Pluribus Unum, and the Reilly Center for Media & Public Affairs. This work was commissioned to examine the disparities of Covid-19's impact on Black Baton Rouge communities and advance initiatives that may mitigate the systemic underpinnings of racial disparities and its intersection with the pandemic. The aim of the project is to acknowledge that all Black communities are essential, including those in service occupations, and acknowledgement of their narratives and the necessities needed by the group are significance they navigate Covid-19.

The research includes web-based data from 322 Black Baton Rouge participants. It draws attention to specific characteristics/traits, including 52% who have or know someone personally who tested positive for Covid-19, and 45% share a household with someone having a serious health condition such as high blood pressure, heart disease, lung disease, or cancer. Forty-five percent live with someone in the home who is currently employed in a job deemed essential work (e.g., mail carrier, grocery store clerk, fast food employee).

Many participants faced changes before and during the pandemic regarding financial assistance, including receiving government stimulus payments, an increase in unemployment benefits, support from food banks, food and financial aid from local churches, monetary assistance from family, and local support non-profit organizations.

Additional outputs include recognizing contextual constraints. Participants noted an increased reliance on "checking in" on family members, neighbors, and friends, mainly through technology. A significant amount of this outreach was aimed at addressing the emotional well-being of loved ones and sharing news updates about the Covid-19 impact on schools, work, and other entities, including transportation.

Participants suggest that decision-makers concentrate on providing resources such as sufficient transportation (e.g., increased bus routes) and access to broadband internet (i.e., the speed in which internet activity reaches devices). Of interest was decreasing potential exposure to Covid-19 by using Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistant Program (SNAP) assistance online to order and have food delivered during. Participants mentioned the need for training on using digital media tools for activities such as telemedicine and requesting prescriptions online.

Considering the current situation of Covid-19 and individual employment conditions, we asked individuals which topics they had the most confidence in concerning employer support. On a scale of 1 "none" to 7 "a lot," healthcare coverage was the most prominent regarding confidence with employers, followed by workplace safety. Participants were least confident concerning receiving childcare compensation, hazard pay, and paid sick leave from employers.

In addressing emotional well-being, among participants, news media consumption of Covid-19 coverage was associated with greater remorse and distress but was not significantly related to feeling infuriated. Black Baton Rouge participants also demonstrated more trust in local news compared to national news, or news from social media sites.

Suggested Next Steps

Digital Media Literacies and Access

Findings suggest that increasing digital literacies or digital technology, including the use of smartphone applications and website navigation, and increased accessibility, such as a debit card, SNAP, and EBT online capabilities, would benefit the community. Also, mitigating the digital divide would help communities utilize digital spaces, such as shopping online and using telemedical services.

Financial Resources

Financial support delivered directly to individuals, local small businesses, and non-profits are crucial as support from family, community members, and local organizations, including churches. All of these entities play a large role in helping families maintain stability throughout the pandemic. According to the data, local non-profits and organizations support community members more now than before the pandemic. However, these entities typically rely on volunteerism and donations, both of which may be impacted by Covid-19. Local non-profits are often the backbone of providing services from after school programs to community workshops such as creating resumes, using digital technology, and more. Focusing on the people who are *in* the community doing the work and supporting their efforts directly are highly encouraged.

Acknowledging and Recognizing Community Resilience

Although consuming more news has positive impacts on trust in leadership, data suggests negative impacts on emotions. Black Baton Rouge individuals are witnessing a rise in positive Covid-19 cases. Data presented here identifies a portion of participants who have contracted the virus or know someone who has contracted the virus. Also, Black individuals explicitly see the impact this virus has on small businesses, schools, and the divide among racial groups, some of whom disregard the pandemic and society's well-being. These realities may influence negative emotions among participants.

The findings related to resilience acknowledge risk reduction strategies utilized by community members, yet to assume there is no need for mental health services among Black communities would be a mistake. These findings showcase traits such as a sense of community, feelings of efficacy, and coping tactics, which are not new, but the group's well-being should be considered.

In summary, Black Baton Rouge residents, as an essential part of the community, deserve to have their narratives acknowledged as policies and funding are allocated to support various communities.

Black & Essential – Top Line

322 self-identified Black & African American Baton Rouge, LA residents participated in an online questionnaire. 48% identified as male, 49% identified as female, and 3% as non-gender binary. 51% did not possess a college (two or four year) degree, and the average age of the sample was 35, ranging from 18 to 76 years of age.

→ Of the sample, 8% tested positive, and 52% know someone personally that has received a positive diagnosis of Covid-19. 40% are not aware of someone personally that has received a positive diagnosis of Covid-19.

→ 45% have someone in their household with a serious health condition such as high blood pressure, heart disease, lung disease, or cancer.

→ 18% have someone in their household that works in a health care setting.

→ 45% have someone in their household employed in a position identified as an “essential worker.”

→ 91% reported having internet access in their homes.

→ 76% had health insurance before Covid-19, and this percentage increased by 2% since the pandemic began.

→ 50% reported having supported family financially before the pandemic. There was a 2% increase among respondents who now support family members financially since the pandemic began.

→ There was a 1% decrease in home stability among respondents since the pandemic began.

→ 29% of households have multiple generations, including grandparents, living together.

→ 8% stated that family members or friends have moved into their homes since the beginning of the pandemic, with an average of two additional people moving in.

→ Among respondents, before the pandemic, 33% mentioned that “once in a while,” there was not enough money in the household for rent or mortgage, 7% of that group stated that this was the case “very often.” Since the pandemic began, this percent has risen overall by 4%, with a 2% increase that “very often” there is not enough money in the household for rent or mortgage.

→ Among respondents, before the pandemic, 37% mentioned that “once in a while,” there was not enough money in the household for food to eat, 7% of that group stated that this was the case “very often.” Since the pandemic began, the percent has risen overall by 1%, with a steady percentage that “very often” there is not enough money in the household for food to eat.

→ Among respondents, before the pandemic, 38% mentioned that “once in a while,” there was not enough money in the household to cover medical care expenses (e.g., co-pays), 8% of that group stated that this was the case “very often.” Since the pandemic began, the percent has decreased by 3%, with a 1% decrease that “very often” there is not enough money in the household to cover medical care expenses.

→ When asked which officials you trust most in receiving information about the pandemic, trust was highest in healthcare providers ($M = 5.15$), followed by the Mayor/President of Baton Rouge ($M = 4.87$), and lowest for the President of the United States ($M = 2.53$).

→ When asked of confidence in support from employers of a range of workplace concerns, respondents were confident in support for continued healthcare coverage ($M = 4.35$), workplace safety ($M = 4.01$), and least in childcare support ($M = 2.85$) and hazard pay if becoming sick or contracting Covid-19 ($M = 3.25$)

→ When asked, “How are you, family, and community members supporting one another during the pandemic?” respondents often referenced task-orientated responsibilities such as picking up groceries or medications for neighbors and family members. Respondents also stated, “We coordinate a food drive where we give away food to local community members” (Male, 49 years old) and “We host a ‘wave by’ for our elders where we caravan past their homes, honk our horns, wave, and drop off cards and gifts” (Female, 56 years old).

→ When asked, “What do you think is needed most from government and private sector officials during the pandemic?” respondents offered explicit examples, including, “My elderly neighbor is an EBT recipient. I try to do most of her shopping for her. But they [government] should put in the work to allow EBT recipients to use their benefits online, (Female, 25 years old) and “There needs to be better access to medical care and special transportation for the elderly” (Female, 38 years old).

→ When asked, “What is an action that you take on to deal with the current situation around Covid-19,” a majority of respondents stated that they aim to adhere to guidelines such as wearing masks, social distancing, and if possible, continuing to quarantine. Some respondents reported that they are now more focused on their health, “I make sure that my family and I are staying healthy, I try to cook healthier and keep fresh fruit and vegetables in the house instead of junk food, and I also make sure that we all take vitamins daily now (Female, 28 years old) and “I take a lot of supplements, herbs and also drink teas. I am also vegan and try to incorporate as much fruit and veggies as possible (Female, 46 years old). Lastly, a majority of respondents mentioned prayers, leaning on their spirituality, and meditation as coping mechanisms or actions undertaken to deal with the ongoing experience of the pandemic.