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Editor's Introduction

COVID-19, Social Inequity, Immigration Enforcement, Open Records, and Representation

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During the last year, we have seen many articles that examined various facets of COVID-19 and its impact on the health and well-being of racial groups, businesses, education, the provision of health care and many other areas using a variety of methodologies. These articles provided a preponderance of evidence that health inequities continue to exist, but they also provided evidence and support to the notion that health and welfare, education, housing and employment are inherently connected.

We began this issue with one article and a research note that follow the COVID-19 theme. The article titled, “COVID-19 and African Americans: A Problem Decades in the Making”, by Allan Hardy, provided interventions that reduce the effect of pandemics in the health care arena. Hardy argued that African Americans were impacted by COVID-19 at an alarmingly high rate when compared to other racial groups (see also Gaynor and Wilson 2020; Wright and Merritt 2020; and Menifield and Clark 2021). He pointed out that death rates among African Americans are linked to exposure to certain risk factors such as access to health care, overcrowding in urban areas, high levels of poverty, and the use of public transportation. In his view, factors such as these have caused the group to suffer poor health outcomes. He suggested that policy makers consider expanding the Affordable Care Act, and increase Medicare/Medicaid reimbursements to name a few examples to address the health care disparities. Given the fear of the medical profession more generally in the black community, he suggested that medical school be graded on their graduation rates of students from at-risk communities; hiring of faculty from at-risk communities; and their acceptance of medical school graduates from at-risk communities. He also provided interventions to address poverty in minority communities. For example, he suggested increasing support for historically black colleges, increasing capital for underrepresented minority entrepreneurs and increasing the minimum wage. Finally, he offered interventions to address the high rates of obesity in the black community. He argued that: small farmers should be subsidized to grow healthier foods; local grocery stores and/or farmer’s markets should be subsidized; the federal government should increase support for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP); and laws that dictate fruit and vegetable choices in schools should be reevaluated.

The research brief titled, “A Third Pandemic is on the Horizon”, by Mark A. Fleming II and Michael D. Williams examined how public policy, not directly connected to health outcomes, can be used to address pandemics and its impact on black, indigenous and people of color (BIPOC). He began his discussion by addressing the role of the Fair Housing Act in creating all black communities (redlining) and the roles of banks in perpetuating these communities. Unfortunately, black communities were often not located close to grocery stores; highways that increased access to employment opportunities; schools; and hospitals. As a result, these and other factors increased the marginal costs associated with securing proper health care, educational activities and an array of other things that could improve the overall well-being of the black community. He argued that in order to achieve “Liberty and Justice for All”, governments should consider the three aforementioned items if they truly want to prevent and moderate a third pandemic.

David L. Baker and Ann Marie Johnson addressed unpaid government internships in the next article titled, “Social Inequity on the Networks of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration’s Doorsteps: Unpaid Governmental Internships”. In this research, the authors reviewed the service learning pedagogical benefits of unpaid internships from a social equity lens. More specifically, they considered the governmental internship paradigm with respect to stated guidelines that inherently created access barriers for particular socioeconomic groups. They argued that paid governmental internships increased the applicant pool, modeled “more meaningful employee treatment,” focused “students on serious work results,” replaced “income forgone from other employment” opportunities, and supported “social mobility for the socioeconomically disadvantaged while increasing opportunities for a more representative governmental bureaucracy”. They concluded by arguing that the social equity values espoused by NASPAA (Network of School of Public Affairs and Administration) were not consistent with reality. That is, because governmental internships are often unpaid, the socioeconomically disadvantaged are more likely to be negatively impacted. Thus, “innovative leadership from the NASPAA is required to preserve social equity as a public service value.” To that end, NASPAA should readdress its government internship strategy by: modifying accreditation standards, and advocating for federal internship reforms and national tracking data.

The next article, “Dividing Lines: Comparing Predictors of Public Policy Preferences Toward Refugees and Local Involvement in Immigration Enforcement in a U.S. State”, by Grant E. Rissler and Brittany Keegan began by reviewing factors that influence attitudes towards refugees, immigrants and immigration policy. More specifically, the authors utilized data from a public opinion survey assessing attitudes towards Syrian refugees in Virginia. Their analysis addressed two main questions. The first question focused on supporting or opposing Virginia taking in refugees from Syria and other majority Muslim countries. The second question focused on local governments using their resources to enforce federal immigration laws. They found, using a logistic regression model, that respondents with higher educational levels and those who were ideologically more liberal were associated with more positive attitudes towards taking in refugees from majority Muslim countries and more negative attitudes towards using local resources to enforce federal immigration laws.

They also found that “other Non-Hispanic” respondents were less likely than black respondents to support taking in refugees, but more likely to support utilizing local resources to enforce federal immigration laws. Participants with some college or less education were less likely to welcome refugees and those with lower educational levels were also associated with higher support for utilizing public funds to support federal immigration laws. Finally, they found that rural participants were substantially less likely to support taking in refugees

when compared to urban and suburban participants. In their conclusions, they recommended that local governments assess their resident's opinions on immigration policies and develop sustainable solutions to achieve their outcomes.

Geoffrey Propheter examined access to property tax records and criminal behavior in the next article titled, "Do Open Records Facilitate Criminal Behavior? The Case of Property Tax Records". The goal of his research was to determine if transparency in government records facilitated criminal behavior. Using a difference-in-difference empirical model with data from 150 counties in Georgia in 2005 and 2007, he found no systematic relationships between online property tax records and property crime (see also Piotrowski 2017 for a more general discussion of transparency in government). When considering the three policies that the state and local governments embraced to protect homeowners (remove the name search function; remove the names of particular individuals; or remove an electors name), he found that the policy of removing the name search function from online records actually increased transaction costs. However, the policy that allowed electors to request removal of self-identifying information appeared to balance the interest of electors and business interests.

The next article, "A Seat at the Table: Minority Representation and County Governing Board", by Al G. Gourrier, Leander D. Kellogg, E. Lee Bernick, and Katheryn Brekken examined the electoral process at the county level. More specifically, they assessed the extent to which minority groups were represented on governing boards. This is an important question given the growing attention to social equity and barriers to representation in recent years. Their data set included a stratified random sample (urban versus non-urban counties) of 400 counties from the more than 3,000 counties in the U.S.

In their analysis they posed six hypotheses and found that counties located in southern states, counties with a larger minority population, counties designated as urban, and counties with large boards were more likely to elect minority representative to county boards. This finding was largely driven by larger numbers of minorities in the region. They also found that partisan elections were not significant in determining the propensity to elect a minority representative and counties with at-large voting districts were less likely to elect a minority representative.

The key question addressed in the next article by Stephanie Dolamore, Alexander Henderson and Tony Carrizales, titled, "Structural Obstacles for Women in Academia: Availability and Costs of Campus Child Care", was "how do NASPAA schools vary in their support of women in academia through available and affordable campus child care centers?" After discussing the structural challenges facing women in academia, the authors used descriptive data collected from NASPAA accredited universities websites, and other child care and human resources; and data collected from the Integrated Postsecondary Educational Data System (IPEDS) to address their key question. They found that the vast majority (73%) of NASPAA accredited institutions provided some form of campus-child care and it was available to students, staff and faculty. Little differences were found with respect to region of the country, but other factors such as the size and type (public versus private) of the university did matter. Public and larger institutions were more likely to provide child care facilities. Finally, they argued that "work-life balance must be embodied in the organizational culture of institutions, not just policies or support programs, like campus-based child care."

The final article, by Sharon H. Mastracci and Ian T. Adams, titled, "Women's Representation in State Politics: Linking Descriptive and Substantive Representation to Health and Economic Outcomes", drew upon various representation theories to determine if

women legislators acted on behalf of women's interest policies that directly impact women (see also Menifield 2001). Using 2013 data from the Center for American Progress, which graded all 50 states on their policies to improve women's wellbeing, they found that improved economic policy outcomes for women and families is positively linked to the number of women in state legislatures. That is, as the number of women in state legislatures increased, so did economic policies affecting women, even when other variables were controlled. The authors do however point out the limitations of their analysis as it was time sensitive. They also indicated that there could be other variables that affect changes in women's representation and policy outcomes (see Riccucci and Van Ryzin 2017 for a public administration view of gender representation in bureaucracies).

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