

Rapid Response: COVID-19 and Black Africans in the UK: Disparities linked to underlying inequalities in health

by

F. Alloh, P. Regmi & E. van Teijlingen

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Rapid response to: Is ethnicity linked to incidence or outcomes of covid-19?
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Rapid Response:

COVID-19 and Black Africans in the UK: Disparities linked to underlying inequalities in health

Dear Editor,

The COVID-19 pandemic has drawn attention to the impact of health inequality on the virus outcome. In response to the important conversations in the *BMJ* and *Lancet* around Black and Ethnic Minorities (BAMEs) and the disproportionate severity of COVID-19 among this group in the UK [1,2]. BAMEs account for more than 34% of critically ill patients from COVID-19, keeping in mind that this group only make up 14% of the total population in the UK [3]. In comparison to the White population have only 73.6% of deaths while

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Folashade Tawakalitu Alloh

Public health lecturer

Pramod Regmi, Edwin van Teijlingen

School of Health, Sport and Bioscience, University of East London, London, E15 4LZ

[@PgrResearcher](#)

Dear Editor,

The COVID-19 pandemic has drawn attention to the impact of health inequality on the virus outcome. In response to the important conversations in the *BMJ* and *Lancet* around Black and Ethnic Minorities (BAMEs) and the disproportionate severity of COVID-19 among this group in the UK [1,2]. BAMEs account for more than 34% of critically ill patients from COVID-19, keeping in mind that this group only make up 14% of the total population in the UK [3]. In comparison to the White population have only 73.6% of deaths while representing more than 85% of the total population, this brings -14% deaths in this group when compared to the total population representation.

However, we would like to focus this conversation on disproportionate infection and mortality of the black-African population due to COVID-19 in the UK. This is important because Black-African has been reported to be more disadvantaged than other BAMEs [4]. It has been reported that black-Africans make up 5.8% of the cases of COVID deaths while representing only 3.5% of the total population. They have highest hospital deaths with three times that of the White population [5]. In comparison, Asian group made up 7.6% of deaths due to COVID-19 while representing 7.7% of the total population. Similarly in London, black-African accounted for more than 16% of the deaths while only representing 13% of the total population. This is higher in comparison to Whites 55.9% deaths with 59.8% representation of the population and Asian 16.4% deaths while representing 18.5% of the population [6]. This prompted us to review publications in relation to COVID-19 outcome among BAMEs in the UK and found that no study has focused on Black-Africans and the severity of COVID-19 outcome among individuals from this group.

Black- African population in the UK have continuously faced health inequality which has disadvantaged this group in relation to COVID-19 outcome. African population have a higher burden of non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, mental health in the UK [7]. Furthermore, cultural beliefs in regard to conditions such as HIV and AIDs and

tuberculosis have contributed to the higher burden of these diseases among African populations in the UK [8]. These burdens of chronic disease among black-African populations have implications for the higher burden of COVID-19 reported within these groups.

Other factors such as genetic composition, vitamin D deficiency, vaccine from country of birth, immune system performance might be important in COVID-19 outcome among Africans in the UK [9]. In addition, limited access to health-care services, working in high-risk jobs such as care worker, health worker has made African immigrants more susceptible to COVID-19 infection and mortality. This is in addition to the overly-representation of this group in low socio-economic status which has important implications on health and wellbeing.

Finally, COVID-19 has highlighted the disparity of African population health in the UK as compared to the general population. We feel it is time that policy address this long-overdue inequality in health among BAMEs and African population in particular. It should not be expected as normal that these groups are worse hit by COVID-19 or any other diseases. Targeted research is needed to understanding the implications of inequality on health of Black-Africans that are disproportionately affected by disease conditions.

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