



Systemic Racism, The Government's Pandemic Response, and Racial Inequities in Covid-19

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During the COVID-19 pandemic, federal and state governments in the US have ignored racial and ethnic minorities' unequal access to employment and health care, which has resulted in racial inequities in COVID-19 infections and deaths. In addition, they have enacted laws that further exacerbate these inequities. Consequently, many racial and ethnic minorities are employed in low-wage essential jobs that lack paid sick leave and health insurance. This lack of benefits causes them to go to work even when they are sick and prevents them from receiving appropriate medical treatment. As a result, racial and ethnic minorities have disproportionately been infected and died from COVID-19. Although these actions seem race "neutral," they exemplify systemic racism, wherein racial and ethnic minorities are deemed inferior to white people, and thus do not receive the same access to resources, such as employment and health care. This essay illustrates how systemic racism has resulted in racial inequities in COVID-19 infections and deaths through case studies in employment and health care. Using the health justice framework, it concludes with suggestions to eradicate systemic racism, redress harm, and engage community in implementing an equitable pandemic response.

Ruqaiijah Yearby, J.D., M.P.H is a full professor and member of the Center for Health Law Studies at Saint Louis University School of Law. She is also co-founder and Executive Director of Saint Louis University's Institute for Healing Justice and Equity. Recently, Professor Yearby authored a report entitled, [Protecting Workers that Provide Essential Services](#) and co-authored, [Racism is a Public Health Crisis. Here's How to Respond](#). Using empirical data, her research explores the ways in which discrimination prevents vulnerable populations from attaining equal access to quality health care, resulting in health inequities. Her work has been cited in THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF PUBLIC HEALTH ETHICS (2019), DOLGIN & SHEPARD, BIOETHICS AND THE LAW (4th ed 2019), and MARK HALL, ET AL, HEALTH CARE LAW AND ETHICS (9th ed 2018). She earned her B.S. in Honors Biology from the University of Michigan, M.P.H. from Johns Hopkins School of Public Health, and her J.D. from Georgetown University Law Center.