

Impact of COVID-19 on Male Minority and Vulnerable Populations

Salvatore J. Giorgianni, Jr., PharmD* & Armin Brott, MBA**

Men's Health Network: P. O. Box 75972: Washington, D.C.20013
202-543-MHN-1 (6461) : Report@menshealthnetwork.org : www.MensHealthNetwork.org

About This Monograph

Men's Health Network (MHN) is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to provide health awareness advocacy to men, boys, and their families where they live, work, play, and pray. Patient Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI) provides funding to support programs that help people make informed health care by producing and promoting high-integrity, evidence-based research guided by patients, caregivers, and the broader health care community.

Program

This report is based on an expert panel convened by MHN on February 26, 2021, and partially funded by PCORI. Participants in this e-conference came from the public and private sectors including economists, policymakers, men's health activists, researchers and professionals who work with boys and men.

Background

Much of this discussion builds on the understanding of the unique behavioral health issues faced by males covered in depth by MHN in the core publication, ["Behavioral Health Aspects of Depression and Anxiety in the American Male: Identifying Areas of Patient-Centered Outcome-Oriented Needs, Practices, and Future Research,"](#)¹

Panel Discussion Summary

The conference was structured to discuss a broad range of issues on how the COVID-19 pandemic has adversely impacted the mental health of minority and vulnerable population males and their families.

The panel addressed 5 broad themes that were woven into the overall dialogue and formed the basis for developing consensus-driven recommendations. These are:

- 1.As a framework to the discussion, Jean Bonhomme, MD, MPH, President and Founder of the National Black Men's Health Network, reviewed some of the fundamental ways COVID-19 has affected minority boys and men. The panel established consensus definitions of the terms "minority" and "vulnerable population" to be used throughout the conference.
- 2.There was a robust discussion of how past pandemics disproportionately impacted these populations. The panel also discussed how the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in the United States, differs from other pandemics, including its temporal relationship to this time of national social and racial introspection.
- 3.The panel offered many important and broad ranging comments, observations, and recommendations regarding the constellation of impacts and problems COVID-19 has had on various communities. These

include the challenge of developing COVID-related messaging specifically for boys and men in a variety of sociocultural settings, including those who live in the inner-city or in indigenous communities, or are severely economically disadvantaged. The panel also reviewed issues facing those in foster care, with developmental disabilities, and victims of human-trafficking and sexual abuse.

- 4.Several panel members discussed the challenges posed for males involved in the judicial and corrections systems, both of whose normal operations have been adversely impacted by COVID-19. Panelists also discussed the existence of educational constraints in minority communities and their effects on employment opportunities.
- 5.The panel suggested potential remedies, including more assertive approaches to recruiting, supporting, and educating young men of color into health professions and the use of peer-to-peer programs to deliver important community-based educational programs about important and often difficult-to-discuss health messages.

Recommended Next Steps and Areas Of Research

Each of these discussion themes was woven into the overall dialogue and formed the basis for the following consensus-driven recommendations and research areas to address the unique and pressing issues facing minority and vulnerable boys and men:

- 1.In order to develop health care and support services that can be more effective in times of emergency, a series of research studies in various minority and vulnerable population sectors are needed to better understand how physical and emotional stress during a pandemic impacts the overall health.

¹<https://www.menshealthnetwork.org/library/depression-anxiety-males-report-summary.pdf>

2. There is a need to develop and evaluate programs and practices that can better reach minority communities and vulnerable individuals and address the fundamental structural impediments to good health that exist. Local programs that do this should be supported for further development and expansion into other communities.
3. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the widespread nature of vaccine hesitancy, particularly in some minority communities and demographics. Conducting broad-based research into the myriad factors that feed into vaccine hesitancy for all vaccines is imperative.
4. To better understand the causes of vaccine hesitancy in these populations, it is imperative to conduct comparative research to identify specific ways—in terms of communication, education, or other approaches—to restore trust in health care and science. For this work to be truly meaningful and impactful, it must be stratified by sex, gender, population, socioeconomic, and racial demographics.
5. US male mortality is significantly higher than female mortality in many areas. Black and Native American men's life expectancy is significantly shorter than the average male's. At the same time Black, Hispanic, and Native populations are disproportionately likely to have one or more comorbid conditions known to increase the potential for serious sequela or death from COVID-19 infection. It is therefore a strategic imperative to address known health disparities between men and women and to enhance the overall health of American males, particularly minority and vulnerable males.
6. We must establish an Office of Men's Health within the Department of Health and Human Services and fund the already existing Office of Indian Men's Health. These steps are essential to helping raise awareness of male health disparities and the inequities facing men and boys. These two government offices are a necessary platform from which to examine, establish, promote, and finance important national health policy and projects designed to enhance the mental and physical health of men and boys.
7. Many minority males desire health providers who come from the same ethnic and/or sociocultural backgrounds. There is a need to qualitatively and quantitatively document how access to sociocultural peer-to-peer health care providers impacts the determinants of health and health outcomes across the range of sociocultural diversity.
8. The panel unanimously believes the lack of men—and especially men of color—in the health care workforce must be addressed. Improving gender- and racial/social diversity will increase the likelihood of delivering optimal clinical care to minority men and will help correct the widespread distrust that impedes effective public and clinical health care services in many minority communities in health care. All health care professional groups and educators should conduct top-to-bottom reviews of their manpower diversity, including the percentage of male providers. They should also develop 10-year workplans designed to address gaps by enhancing recruitment, educational opportunities, and the availability of cultural and financial support.
9. In order to make healthcare delivery more aligned with the preferences and needs of males, a core curricular framework for health professionals that focuses on male-specific health issues is needed. Professions should conduct a comprehensive curricular review to better train providers in delivering care to males. Professional credentialing organizations must incorporate male health management into certification and continuing-education.
10. An expert commission should establish a core data set that will include patient sex as a basic element. Without this data, it is difficult to make ongoing real-time decisions about the effectiveness of vaccination and other critical health protocols and develop strategies.

FULL TEXT OF THIS REPORT CAN BE ACCESSED ELECTRONICALLY AT
www.menshealthnetwork.org/library/behavioral-health-boys-men-covid-19-minorities.pdf

About Men's Health Network (MHN)

MHN is an international non-profit organization whose mission is to reach men, boys, and their families where they live, work, play, and pray with health awareness messages and tools, screening programs, educational materials, advocacy opportunities, and patient navigation. MHN is the sponsor of Men's Health Month (June) and Wear Blue Day. MHN maintains the TesticularCancerAwarenessMonth.com and ProstateCancerAwarenessMonth.com websites. For information on MHN's programs and activities, visit them at menshealthnetwork.org, on Twitter ([@MensHlthNetwork](https://twitter.com/MensHlthNetwork)), and on Facebook (facebook.com/menshealthnetwork), or call 212-543-6461.

* Sr. Science Advisor Men's Health Network and President, Griffon Consulting Group, Inc.

** Member Men's Health Network Board of Advisors, President, Healthy Men, Inc.