System hurdles for COVID-19 in older minority population: before, during and post-COVID-19 infection and all the way to vaccine protection

Leidy's Gutierrez-Martinez1,2, Mia Touma3, Sylvia Josephy-Hernandez1,2,4, Zeina Chemali1,2,4
1Department of Neurology, Massachusetts General Hospital; 2Harvard Medical School; 3Boston University; 4Department of Psychiatry, Massachusetts General Hospital

Background
- Nationwide lockdown on top of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on society.
- Already vulnerable populations, such as Latinx and African American older adults, have been deeply affected.

Methods
- Literature and government health records addressing current health statuses among minority older adults due to the pandemic were retrieved.
- Existing healthcare disparities deepened by the pandemic were studied from health, social, and economic dimensions.
- We characterized the epidemiological situation before, during, and post-COVID-19 pandemic, including known data about the vaccination campaign progress.

Results

Risk of COVID-19 Outcomes Stratified by Age
Compared to 5-17 years old:
- Despite similar rates of contracting COVID-19 after age 30, hospitalization rates went from 15 times higher at ages 40 to 49 years old, to 55 times higher at ages 75 to 84 years old (2).
- The rate of death due to COVID-19 went from 130 times higher at ages 40 to 49, to 2800 times higher at ages 75 to 84 (2).

Risk of COVID-19 Outcomes Stratified by Race/Ethnicity
Compared to White, Non-Hispanics:
- African American, Non-Hispanic persons were 1.1 times more likely to contract COVID-19, 2.9 times more likely to be hospitalized, and 1.9 times more likely to die from COVID-19 (3).
- Hispanic or Latin persons were 1.3 times more likely to contract COVID-19, 3.2 times more likely to be hospitalized, and 2.3 times more likely to die from COVID-19 (3).

Labor Force Characteristics and Unemployment by Race/Ethnicity
- In 2016, unemployment rates were higher among Latin American and Hispanic/Latin communities compared to Whites (4).
- In April 2020, unemployment rates reached 18.9% and 16.7% among Latin and African American communities, respectively, compared to 14.1% among White communities (5).

Health Insurance and Internet Access
- Greater lack of insurance among minority populations and limited internet access among older adults present a barrier to adequate healthcare amidst the pandemic (6,7).

Conclusions
- The situation among minority older adults is a health, social, and economic emergency that need to be targeted at its root, given its impact on our medical and psychosocial systems.
- The pandemic has triggered a continuous learning process that, hopefully, will empower ourselves to better meet further challenges.
- It is crucial that we do not stand idle causing immense damage by doing nothing.