



The Impact of the COVID-19 on Health among Low-Income Workers in the United States

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Abstract

The economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic will linger for years, with significant impacts on the health of the workforce. Evidence to date suggests that the pandemic has different effects on workers' health, depending on whether they are classified as "essential" workers (e.g., first responders, health care workers, transportation workers) due to the exemption of 'stay-at-home' implementation as well as the degree of risk exposure. This study will explore how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted physical and mental health among low-income workers, with special attention to essential workers. Data came from the Household Pulse Survey, administered by the U.S. Census Bureau, which has collected information on how the pandemic impacted households. Using the five phases of the data, collected every quarter starting in April 2020, the study sample was restricted to low-income workers (N=695,205). This study examined their changes in physical and mental health statuses, using a random coefficient regression analysis with a focus on essential workers. After controlling for demographic and socioeconomic factors, essential workers were at a greater risk for physical health and mental health problems, than those in nonessential work. Essential workers in low occupational class (e.g., unskilled manual jobs) were at a greater risk of being in poor physical health than those in higher occupational class. Economic recessions place a disproportionate burden on low-income essential workers, with significant impacts on physical health and mental health. During the pandemic, essential workers were at increased risk of mental health conditions such as anxiety, compared with those in nonessential work. Findings highlight the need to recognize the challenge this vital workforce face in pandemics and have an important public health and policy implication to protect this population.

Keywords: Covid-19, Physical health, Mental health, Essential workers, Low-income workers.