

On “Percentage of Black Population and Primary Care Shortage Areas Associated with Higher COVID-19 Case and Death Rates in Georgia Counties”

To the Editor: We congratulate Dr Peter Baltrus and colleagues for their article “Percentage of Black Population and Primary Care Shortage Areas Associated with Higher COVID-19 Case and Death Rates in Georgia Counties,” published in the February 2021 issue of the *Southern Medical Journal*.¹ The authors used Georgia county-level data from the Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center to evaluate the cumulative event rate of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) infection. They adjusted for the racial and socioeconomic variables at the county level and found that counties with a higher percentage of Black population were more likely to have higher rates of COVID-19 infection. In addition, Baltrus

and colleagues found that the death rate from COVID-19 is higher in counties with a higher Black population.

Although all racial groups have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, the work by Baltrus et al highlights that the pandemic had a more significant impact on the racial and ethnic minority groups, especially the Black population. A similar trend was noted as a collateral effect of the pandemic in the neighboring state of South Carolina, where the percentage of Black patients seeking medical evaluation for stroke declined significantly from 29% before the pandemic to 13.9% during the first few weeks of the pandemic.² Another study found that the percentage of Black patients who received endovascular therapy for stroke had declined from 32.9% before the pandemic to 23.8% during the pandemic.³

The article by Baltrus and colleagues, in addition to the above-mentioned papers, calls attention to the disproportionate effect of COVID-19 on minority groups and highlights the need for future interventions to mitigate the long-term effects of

racial and ethnic disparity in the access to healthcare services.

Eyad Almallouhi, MD
Sami Al Kasab, MD

Departments of Neurosurgery and Neurology
Medical University of South Carolina
Charleston, South Carolina

DOI: 10.14423/SMJ.0000000000001310

References

1. Baltrus PT, Douglas M, Li C, et al. Percentage of black population and primary care shortage areas associated with higher COVID-19 case and death rates in Georgia counties. *South Med J* 2021;114:57–62.
2. Cummings C, Almallouhi E, Al Kasab S, et al. Blacks are less likely to present with strokes during the COVID-19 pandemic: observations from the buckle of the Stroke Belt. *Stroke* 2020;51:3107–3111.
3. Al Kasab S, Almallouhi E, Alawieh A, et al. Alarming downtrend in mechanical thrombectomy rates in African American patients during the COVID-19 pandemic—insights from STAR. *J Neurointerv Surg* 2021;13:304–307.