

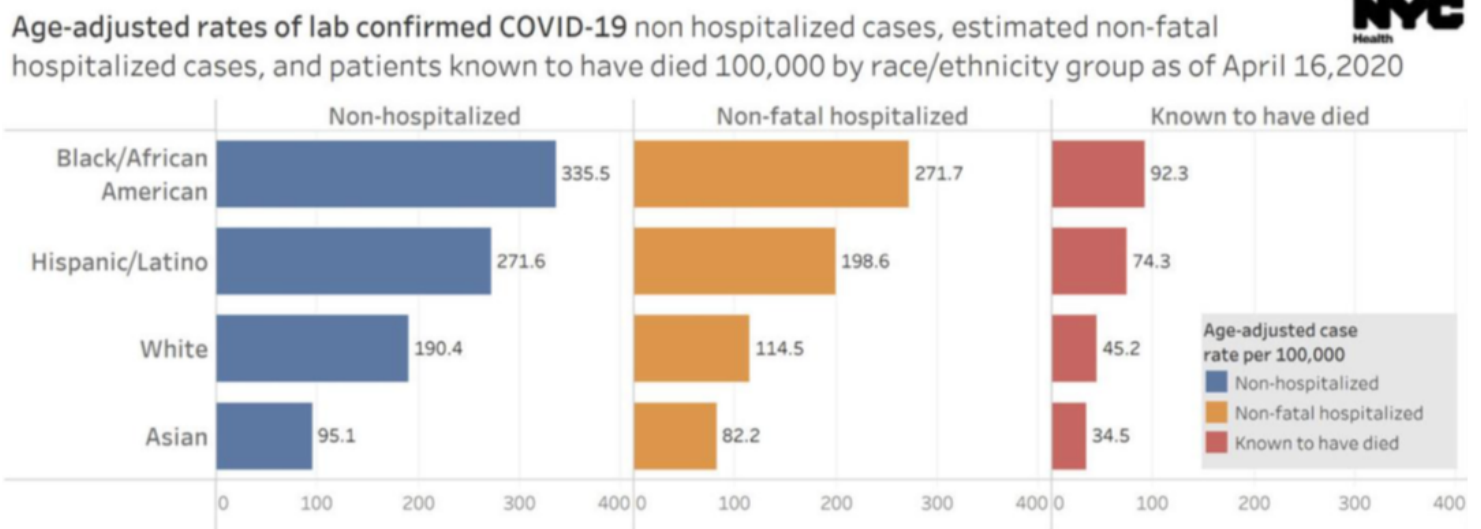
The Impact of Racial Microaggressions and COVID-19



By: Alex L. Andrade Jr., PsyD
Primary Care Psychologist

It has been some time since I completed my dissertation attempting to examine how individuals cope with racial microaggressions. *Racial microaggressions* are defined as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target group or person” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 273). Upon learning about the term racial microaggressions, I almost immediately sought to understand how people of color might cope with such experiences. I also wondered about the impact of racial microaggressions. Recently, this thought arose again upon hearing about the rates at which African Americans and Latino Americans have been contracting and dying from COVID-19. Few words are needed more than these... THIS is the impact of racial microaggressions.

In the last several days, increasing reports have come out indicating a greater number of African Americans and Latino Americans contracting and dying from COVID-19. In a recent article titled, “Covid-19’s Devastating Toll on Black and Latino Americans, In One Chart,” reporter Dylan Scott included the following chart from the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.



In New York, African Americans are contracting and being hospitalized at higher rates than White Americans, including dying at twice the rate of White Americans (Scott, 2020). Similarly, Latino Americans are also contracting, being hospitalized, and dying at rates higher than White Americans (Scott, 2020). The impact of racial microaggressions leads to the disparities that result in people of color having differing access to medical services, a disproportionate number of health issues, and ultimately, a greater risk of contracting diseases such as COVID-19. It might easily be considered a stretch that the brief, subtle slights encountered by people of color could culminate into what is happening now. It might easily be said that these disparities are not due to race but instead other factors such as socioeconomic factors or geographical locations (e.g., urban versus rural). However, as is often the case, these disparities are related to race and ethnicity.

The clear and sharp contrast between African Americans and Latino Americans as compared to White Americans brings to light the importance of acknowledging and addressing racial and ethnic differences, particularly those that are subtle and appear to not have an impact, until something such as COVID-19 happens. At the current moment, so much is happening and people are starting to ask why and how all this has happened, including the aforementioned disparities. As we begin to examine these issues, we must address both the blatant and obvious racial and ethnic disparities as well as the brief and subtle ones that contribute to the situation we find occurring now.

References

- Scott, D. (2020, April 17). Covid-19’s devastating toll on black and Latino Americans, in one chart. *Vox*. Retrieved from <http://www.vox.com>
- Sue, D., Capodilupo, C., Torino, G., Bucceri, J., Holder, A., Nadal, K., ... Esquilin, M. (2007). Racial microaggressions in everyday life: Implications for clinical practice. *American Psychologist*, 62, 271-286. doi:10.1037/0003-066X.62.4.271