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Towards Ending Societal Barriers to COVID-19 Testing in the United States: The TEST-US Study

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Introduction: Given the oppression associated with the intersections of race/ethnicity, sex, and social status, racial/ethnic minority women continually experience adverse health outcomes. The extent to which racial/ethnic discrimination has amplified the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on minority women is unknown. Towards Ending Societal Barriers to COVID-19 Testing in the United States (TEST-US) is a community-engaged research project conducted through Meharry Medical College's Center for Women's Health Research. Our objective was to investigate the impact of racial/ethnic discrimination on COVID-19 testing and vaccine uptake among minority women and their families. This practicum allowed me to join an interprofessional team and gain experience designing, implementing, and evaluating a multisite study.

Methods: The Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) provides services to women in resource-restricted communities. Data were collected from Black and Hispanic women (aged 18+) who received services at four YWCA sites: Atlanta, Nashville, El Paso, and Tucson. Focus groups and a survey were used to understand women's experiences during the pandemic, including access to COVID-19 testing/vaccination, and feelings about the vaccine and healthcare in general. Prioritizing community-engaged research, weekly meetings occurred with YWCA site coordinators to assist with study recruitment and progress, and the team met twice with a community advisory board to ensure the study was relevant to the community.

Results: Meetings with site coordinators revealed unanticipated challenges with study participation. Preliminary qualitative analysis revealed barriers to testing/vaccination, including fear, distrust, and lack of information. A total of 669 women of our proposed 680 completed the survey between June 24 and November 23. Preliminary analyses revealed that 25.3% of women reported they have had COVID-19, 72.1% of women had a COVID-19 test, and only 12.1% of women had received the COVID-19 vaccine.

Conclusions: This study, although ongoing, confirms the need for increased resources to combat the impact of discrimination and the pandemic on minority women.