# Black and Essential –
# Coping Strategies and Narratives of Black Baton Rouge,
# Louisiana Residents During Covid-19



(Image provided by StockSnap from Pixabay)

E PLURIBUS
UNUM

LSU | Manship School of
Mass Communication
Reilly Center for Media & Public Affairs

Executive Summary
Prepared by: David L. Stamps, Ph.D.

The following summary is a collaboration between Dr. David Stamps (primary investigator), E Pluribus Unum, and the Reilly Center for Media & Public Affairs. This work was commissioned to examine the disparities of Covid-19's impact on Black Baton Rouge communities and advance initiatives that may mitigate the systemic underpinnings of racial disparities and its intersection with the pandemic. The aim of the project is to acknowledge that all Black communities are essential, including those in service occupations, and acknowledgment of their narratives and the necessities needed by the group are significant as they navigate Covid-19.

The research includes web-based data from 322 Black Baton Rouge participants. It draws attention to specific characteristics/traits, including 52% who have or know someone personally who tested positive for Covid-19, and 45% share a household with someone having a serious health condition such as high blood pressure, heart disease, lung disease, or cancer. Forty-five percent live with someone in the home who is currently employed in a job deemed essential work (e.g., mail carrier, grocery store clerk, fast food employee).

Many participants faced changes before and during the pandemic regarding financial assistance, including receiving government stimulus payments, an increase in unemployment benefits, support from food banks, food and financial aid from local churches, monetary assistance from family, and local support non-profit organizations.

Additional outputs include recognizing contextual constraints. Participants noted an increased reliance on "checking in" on family members, neighbors, and friends, mainly through technology. A significant amount of this outreach was aimed at addressing the emotional well-being of loved ones and sharing news updates about the Covid-19 impact on schools, work, and other entities, including transportation.

Participants suggest that decision-makers concentrate on providing resources such as sufficient transportation (e.g., increased bus routes) and access to broadband internet (i.e., the speed in which internet activity reaches devices). Of interest was decreasing potential exposure to Covid-19 by using Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistant Program (SNAP) assistance online to order and have food delivered during. Participants mentioned the need for training on using digital media tools for activities such as telemedicine and requesting prescriptions online.

Considering the current situation of Covid-19 and individual employment conditions, we asked individuals which topics they had the most confidence in concerning employer support. On a scale of 1 "none" to 7 " a lot," healthcare coverage was the most prominent regarding confidence with employers, followed by workplace safety. Participants were least confident concerning receiving childcare compensation, hazard pay, and paid sick leave from employers.

In addressing emotional well-being, among participants, news media consumption of Covid-19 coverage was associated with greater remorse and distress but was not significantly related to feeling infuriated. Black Baton Rouge participants also demonstrated more trust in local news compared to national news, or news from social media sites.

<center>**Suggested Next Steps**</center>

**Digital Media Literacies and Access**
Findings suggest that increasing digital literacies or digital technology, including the use of smartphone applications and website navigation, and increased accessibility, such as a debit card, SNAP, and EBT online capabilities, would benefit the community. Also, mitigating the digital divide would help communities utilize digital spaces, such as shopping online and using telemedical services.

**Financial Resources**
Financial support delivered directly to individuals, local small businesses, and non-profits are crucial as support from family, community members, and local organizations, including churches. All of these entities play a large role in helping families maintain stability throughout the pandemic. According to the data, local non-profits and organizations support community members more now than before the pandemic. However, these entities typically rely on volunteerism and donations, both of which may be impacted by Covid-19. Local non-profits are often the backbone of providing services from after school programs to community workshops such as creating resumes, using digital technology, and more. Focusing on the people who are *in* the community doing the work and supporting their efforts directly are highly encouraged.

**Acknowledging and Recognizing Community Resilience**
Although consuming more news has positive impacts on trust in leadership, data suggests negative impacts on emotions. Black Baton Rouge individuals are witnessing a rise in positive Covid-19 cases. Data presented here identifies a portion of participants who have contracted the virus or know someone who has contracted the virus. Also, Black individuals explicitly see the impact this virus has on small businesses, schools, and the divide among racial groups, some of whom disregard the pandemic and society's well-being. These realities may influence negative emotions among participants.

The findings related to resilience acknowledge risk reduction strategies utilized by community members, yet to assume there is no need for mental health services among Black communities would be a mistake. These findings showcase traits such as a sense of community, feelings of efficacy, and coping tactics, which are not new, but the group's well-being should be considered.

In summary, Black Baton Rouge residents, as an essential part of the community, deserve to have their narratives acknowledged as policies and funding are allocated to support various communities.