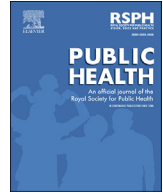




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Letter to the Editor

Building a coalition to fight coronavirus-related discrimination against people of color



Media outlets and online forums are continuing to document the upsurge of verbal and physical assaults against Asian Americans, with polls showing that about one-third of Americans have witnessed someone blaming Asian people for the coronavirus epidemic.¹ Community advocates, legislators, and public health professionals have called for swift measures to protect Asian Americans. However, it is critical that these efforts dovetail with the work of broader coalitions against racism.

An important lesson that we have learned about racial discrimination during times of crisis is that when one racial group is unfairly targeted, other racial groups suffer collateral damage. In the wake of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks (9/11), the Federal Bureau of Investigation reported a spike in anti-Muslim hate crimes.² However, an overlooked statistic is that 21% of Latinx and 22% of Asian Americans (primarily non-Muslims) also reported 9/11-related racial discrimination (authors' calculations³).

During the coronavirus pandemic, data from the Understanding America Study have shown that being Asian American was associated with 4.1 times higher odds of experiencing coronavirus-related discrimination when compared with non-Hispanic whites, adjusting for sociodemographic characteristics and prior experiences of everyday discrimination.⁴ Interestingly, being non-Hispanic Black was also significantly associated with 2.8 times higher odds of experiencing coronavirus-related discrimination.

These findings may reflect the activation of tribalism during times of peril. But in the United States—where white supremacy remains a part of the ideological landscape—this means the white majority has the power to redraw the social boundaries of belonging and membership in the country to the exclusion of the 'other' people of color.⁵ As such, we must address coronavirus-related discrimination directed at Asian Americans, while

endeavoring to dismantle the vast system of racism that oppresses all people of color. Furthermore, we in the Asian American community must build partnerships with Black and Latinx American communities who are suffering the greatest financial and health consequences of this pandemic.⁶

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