

Essential Women of Color

Background: COVID-19 has challenged every segment of American society from celebrities to meat packers. Yet, individuals who earn low wages, particularly people of color, are especially vulnerable to COVID-19, both as an infection and as a threat to their well-being. Although the pandemic has laid bare the racial and income inequalities in our society, media often focuses on the strains and coping patterns of shut-in upper income individuals: parents working from home while simultaneously supervising or educating their children, singles finding companionship via Zoom, and neighborhoods creating evening entertainment in the cul-de-sac. Less attention has been paid to individuals who earn low wages, many of whom have been classified as “essential” meaning that they have continued to work in their regular settings throughout stay-at-home orders. Essential workers are disproportionately women of color who have had to make critical decisions to survive the pandemic and address their families' basic needs.

Although health, childcare, educational needs, housing, and food security are threatened for essential workers, little is known about how these “essential” women of color are coping during the COVID-19 pandemic. Coping strategies, generally defined as cognitive and behavioral strategies for managing events and circumstances perceived as stressful (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), can be both helpful and harmful. Behaviors that were benign pre-pandemic, like the occasional enjoyment of alcohol or high calorie foods, under stress can change into problematic behaviors that impair health and well-being. Likewise, everyday social supports that worked pre-pandemic may not be available or useful in the current moment, even as new supports may emerge. COVID-19 will likely not be the last pandemic we face as a society. Therefore, understanding the ways that these essential workers maintain their own well-being and that of their families, as well as ascertaining what outside supports are most useful during a pandemic, are critical to inform future service delivery and planning.

Study Questions: This mixed-methods study will examine coping strategies among women of color who have been deemed “essential workers.” We will collaborate with Village Heart BEAT (VHB) a division of the Mecklenburg County Department of Public Health, which aims to reduce cardiovascular health disparities for Mecklenburg County residents. Dr. Rachel Goode currently partners with VHB with a focus on food insecurity and obesity among Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients. In partnership with over 20 community-based testing sites, VHB is on the frontlines of the epidemic providing COVID-19 testing and education to vulnerable populations. Working with VHB, we will recruit a purposive sample of 200 women of color who are essential workers for a quantitative survey. In addition, we will recruit up to 25 women for an in-depth qualitative interview.

Outcomes and Dissemination: Our findings will have implications for policy makers and service-providers focused on child-care, child well-being, substance use, nutrition, disordered eating, and mental health, among others. We will report our results directly back to VHB and our participants as well as other service providers that serve this population. We will use webinar technology in the event that these events cannot be pursued in person. We will publish summaries and policy briefs on the School of Social Work website.

TEAM: Assistant Professor Rachel Goode, Professor Trenette Clark-Goings, Distinguished Professor Mimi Chapman.

BUDGET: We are requesting \$100,000 to support two doctoral students involved in this work and salary support for Drs. Goode and Clark-Goings. Note that participant incentives will be paid by Dr. Chapman from her Chair Account.

Essential Women of Color: Coping with COVID-19
A Collaboratory Proposal from the UNC- Chapel Hill School of Social work

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Personnel	Role	Type	Effort	Person months	Salary	Fringe	Total
Trenette Goings	Investigator	sum	65.0%	1.95	20,829	6,203	27,032
Rachel Goode	Investigator	sum	65.0%	1.95	17,441	5,361	22,802
Steven Day	Investigator	cal	5.0%	0.6	3,695	1,234	4,929
TBN-1	PhD RA	aca	50.0%	4.5	9,750	2,390	12,140
TBN-2	PhD RA	aca	50.0%	4.5	9,750	2,390	12,140
					61,465	17,578	79,043
PhD tuition							20,957
							100,000

EHRA Salary	41,965
SHRA Salary	
Grad Student	19,500
Temps	
Fringe Pool	17,578
Non-Personnel Expenses	20,957
Total	100,000