

Contact:

Joshua Manson
UCLA Law COVID Behind Bars Data Project
914-357-0000
manson@law.ucla.edu

Study: Hispanic people in Texas prisons dying of COVID-19 at rate double their White peers, Black people dying at rate 1.6 times

A survey of deaths in Texas prisons found that Hispanic and Black populations in prison have died of COVID-19 at rates far exceeding their White peers.

Los Angeles, CA — A new study by the [UCLA Law COVID Behind Bars Data Project](#) has found stark racial disparities among the hundreds of people who have died of COVID-19 in Texas prisons. According to the study, from April 1st, 2020 to March 31st, 2021, Hispanic people in state custody died at a rate 2.0 times greater than that of their White peers, and Black people died at a rate 1.6 times greater than that of their White peers.

Black and Hispanic people are overrepresented in the state's prison system: together, these two groups comprise more than 65 percent of the Texas prison population although constituting roughly half of the state's total population. But the study shows that, even within prisons, Hispanic and Black people were 1.96 and 1.66 times more likely, respectively, to die of COVID-19 than were White people.

According to the study's authors, these disparities ... "suggest that individuals in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) custody are subject to different experiences of incarceration, stratified by race and ethnicity, with inequitable levels of either COVID-19 risk, COVID-19 exposure, or barriers to health care utilization to prevent COVID-19 related mortality." The authors call for further investigation into why Black and Hispanic

populations -- who, according to the authors, did not generally exhibit higher frequencies of pre-existing conditions than did the White population before the pandemic -- have died at such greater rates by COVID-19.

The finding is likely not unique to Texas. Racial inequalities have been identified at multiple levels in the prison legal system and similar racial disparities likely exist in COVID-19 death rates behind bars in other states. Most state prison systems, however, do not publicly report information on COVID-19 infections and deaths by racial and ethnic categories, and thus are continuing to stifle further research.

The study also notes that, although Black and Hispanic populations faced especially dramatic increases, all people in TDCJ custody experienced sharply increased mortality rates due to COVID-19. Between the year preceding the pandemic and the first twelve months of COVID-19, White populations in Texas prisons saw a 52 percent increase in its overall mortality rate.

The standardized all-cause mortality rate across the TDCJ population as a whole, which includes deaths unrelated to COVID-19, increased by 85 percent, with COVID-19 accounting for at least 39 percent of those

deaths.

The study also adds to existing literature showing that incarcerated people have faced much higher rates of infection and death by COVID-19 than their non-incarcerated peers. According to a previous study published by the UCLA Law COVID Behind Bars Data Project with co-authors in the Journal of the American Medical Association, incarcerated people experienced infection rates 5.5 times that of their peers and death rates 3.0 times higher in the early months of the pandemic.

The full study may be found on the med-Rxiv preprint server and is currently pending academic review.

About the UCLA Law COVID Behind Bars Data Project

The UCLA Law COVID Behind Bars Data Project tracks the spread and impact of coronavirus in American jails, prisons, and detention centers, and advocates for greater transparency and accountability around the pandemic response of the carceral system. Project data are available at uclacovidbehindbars.org.