

Call to action for research ethics in the time of COVID-19 and BLM

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Several University of Illinois Chicago faculty members have addressed the issue of how to ethically conduct research with Black populations.

In their paper "Ethics of Research at the Intersection of COVID-19 and Black Lives Matter: A Call to Action," authors Natasha Crooks, an assistant professor, Phoenix Matthews, a professor, both of the UIC College of Nursing, and Geri Donenberg, director of the Center for Dissemination and Implementation Science at the UIC College of Medicine, highlight the historical issues that impact research involving Black populations. They also provide recommendations for researchers to ethically engage Black populations in research. The article is published online in the *Journal of Medical Ethics*.

"Our recommendations include understanding the impact of ongoing trauma, acknowledging historical context, ensuring diverse research teams and engaging in open and honest conversations with Black populations to better address their needs," they said.

The authors call for new standards to engage continued research with Black communities, fully understanding the need for strategies that avoid "re-traumatizing or perpetuating violence of Black lives as disposable at every point of the research process."

"It will also require [research institutions](#) to change how we engage Black populations, commit resources to diversify our workforce and enact antiracist programs and policies to foster greater sensitivity to these

issues," the paper states.

The paper includes three areas targeting change: ensuring research settings are emotionally and physically safe; sharing research findings with communities to facilitate trust and encourage feedback into interpreting results; and having honest conversations with Black participants about how they feel about participating in research, including the risks, strengths and barriers.

Each recommendation includes examples to help implement changes including asking research participants pointed questions regarding safety, concentrating on the participants' experience, using mixed method approaches like open-ended questions and interviews, and sharing research findings transparently.

"Researchers must engage in open and honest conversations with Black participants about how they feel participating in research during the COVID-19 pandemic, including the risks, strengths and barriers," the paper states. "Then, researchers must listen, adjust timelines, protocols and objectives based on the information provided."

Crooks, who conducts research in Black communities frequently, said she has found ways to engage with potential research subjects by adding a personal perspective.

"The most useful thing for me has been going to Black organizations and introducing myself, putting a face to the research. I spend time telling them my story about becoming a Black doctor and how I became interested in this area of research. I give them the space to ask me any questions to help build trust," Crooks said. "It's critical to get groups exposed to participating in research and making them feel comfortable with the research process."

More information: Natasha Crooks et al, Ethics of research at the intersection of COVID-19 and black lives matter: a call to action, *Journal of Medical Ethics* (2021). [DOI: 10.1136/medethics-2020-107054](https://doi.org/10.1136/medethics-2020-107054)

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