

# Poor people died from COVID at twice the rate of wealthy Americans, study finds

April 5 2022, by Deborah Barfield Berry

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People living in poorer counties died of COVID-19 at nearly two times the rate of people in wealthier counties, casting more light on the "shameful" impact of ongoing health and economic disparities,

according to a report released Monday by a national civil rights group and research organizations.

The report comes as the number of COVID-19 related deaths in the United States approaches nearly 1 million.

"The finding of this report reveals neglect and sometimes intentional decisions to not focus on the poor," said William Barber, II, co-chair of the Poor People's Campaign, a national program focusing on social justice issues that commissioned the report. "There hasn't been any systemic or systematic assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on the poor and low-income communities."

Barber and other advocates for the poor released Monday "A Poor People's Pandemic Report: Mapping the Intersection of Poverty, Race and COVID-19." The report highlights disparities, including economic and health, that were exacerbated during the pandemic and those potential factors in [higher death rates](#) in communities with high poverty rates.

Researchers analyzed county-level information, including COVID deaths, poverty, race, unemployment, rent and police violence, said Alainna Lynch, senior research manager for the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), a project under the United Nations Secretary-General that researches issues. Other groups involved with the report include Howard University in Washington, D.C., Repairers of the Breach and the Kairos Center, both groups fighting for social justice issues.

"What we can't say in this report is who are the people that died," said Lynch. "But what we can say is that in the poorest counties, the poorest counties grieved twice the number of deaths than the richest counties."

The [death rates](#) in poorer counties climbed up to five times higher than in richer counties during the recent waves of the Delta and Omicron variants, the report found.

Researchers also looked at 300 counties with the highest death rates and found many had a higher percentage of people living in poverty and a higher percentage of people of color, Lynch said.

The report highlighted examples in six counties, including Hinds County in Mississippi, and includes an interactive dashboard.

Lynch said the reports looked at people living at 200% or less of the poverty line, which meant \$20,000 a year for a single person.

Barber said he wasn't surprised by the anomalies, but by the depth and broadness of the problem and how little governments did to collect data from, "the places of blatant neglect and in some places, downright intentionality, to not measure how poverty and COVID are connected."

Barber, who called the report's findings "shameful," said advocates for the poor have been calling for a meeting with the Biden administration for months to discuss the correlation between poverty and COVID and other issues, but that hasn't happened.

His group is planning a rally June 18 in Washington to highlight the COVID deaths disparities and other concerns facing the poor, including income gaps.

"We cannot wait any longer," he said. "This Congress and this country has got to take serious a comprehensive addressing of poverty."

Civil rights leaders and grassroots activists have long complained about the lack of racial data related to COVID cases and deaths. Early on,

many jurisdictions did not track that data.

Health officials and advocates said the lack of racial data hinders efforts to target resources where it is most needed. A disproportionate number of people working on the frontlines or in essential jobs are people of color.

Some advocates have complained the federal government's slow response to the pandemic, particularly in communities of color, has had a devastating impact.

The Biden administration has defended its efforts to target people of color with resources, including more testing and more vaccination sites.

"Equity remains an important part of any of our plans," Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and chief medical adviser to President Joe Biden, recently said.

Activists said Monday's [report](#) showed the consequences of health care and economic disparities.

"With this data and this analysis, we can see that who died during the pandemic, especially in these phases, in these worst phases, was also a policy choice," said Shailly Gupta Barnes, policy director of the Poor People's Campaign and the Kairos Center. "It was a choice to not see poverty, whether it was white, Black, Latina, Native, Indigenous or all of the above. It was a choice to have these death rates and to not prioritize them, across race, across geography and the worst public health crisis in this country."

"And we know that this wasn't just one policy," she said. "It was years of policies that predate the pandemic, but also continued through it and even now."

Recent Census data shows communities of color lagged economically behind white Americans before the pandemic. And vaccination rates remain lower in communities of color, particularly among children.

Tyrone Gardner said there was a lack of regard for him and other low-income residents who live in his housing projects in Goldsboro, North Carolina, during the first few years of the pandemic. He spent much of that time volunteering to distribute food to needy families. He joined the press conference in Washington to share his story and press for more attention for low-income families. He plans to return for the rally in June.

"We're going to be there marching," he said.

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Citation: Poor people died from COVID at twice the rate of wealthy Americans, study finds (2022, April 5) retrieved 30 June 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-04-poor-people-died-covid-wealthy.html>

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