

A rapid review of the literature on socioeconomic and ethnic health inequalities

Emma Martinez, Ph.D., Sr Scientific Policy Officer, the Federation of European Academies of Medicine



Literature review

- Scoping literature review focussing on impacts of COVID-19 on health inequalities
- **Research question:** Is the pandemic having an unequal impact (e.g. on the risk of Covid-19 infection, hospitalisation, ICU, acute respiratory distress syndrome, long -Covid, mortality) in different individuals/groups in Europe according to socioeconomic status (e.g. occupation, education, income) or to race and ethnicity?



Literature review

Expected benefits:

- To help explain the wider impacts of COVID-19 on vulnerable populations
- To help uncover potential gaps and obstacles in the collection of data on COVID-19 and health inequalities



Methodology

- PubMed search
- Search terms: “socioeconomic determinants”, "socioeconomic", "inequalities", "health inequalities", "health inequities", "inequities", "race" or "ethnicity"
 - AND "Covid-19" or "SARS-Cov-2"
 - AND "Europe"
- All languages and publication types included in the search
- Articles published until 15 May 2021



485 articles



Reviewers Inclusion Criteria

- 2 reviewers screened articles against PICO criteria

Population(s)	All people of any age with a presumptive or confirmed diagnosis of COVID-19
Intervention / Exposure(s)	Social determinants of health (specifically: race/ethnicity; income; educational level; employment status; working conditions)
Comparator	Not applicable
Outcome(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COVID-19 infection incidence (confirmed or presumptive diagnosis) • Acute severe adverse events (specifically: mortality, incidence of acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS), incidence of multiple organ dysfunction syndrome (MODS), incidence of opportunistic infections, incidence of cardiovascular events, Long COVID) • Health care utilization (specifically: hospitalization, ICU admissions, length of stay, use of, and length of time on, supplemental oxygen therapy or mechanical ventilation) • Exclusions: mental health outcomes



85 articles



7 articles



92 articles



Findings

- 26 articles from countries in Europe; 64 studies from the UK; 2 int'al
- Western Europe (8); Southern Europe (9); Sweden (3); Germany (2); Switzerland (1)
- Majority studies report findings at regional level (vs national)
- Study designs: Diverse (UK studies); observational/ecological (European countries)



Findings

- Comparable volume of research on socioeconomic (SE) determinants and COVID-19 outcomes between the UK and EU countries yet a stark difference when reporting on race and ethnicity and COVID-19
- SE determinants most reported about:
 - Gender and deprivation index (mainly UK)
 - Workforce status (UK & EU)
- SE determinants not reported about in:
 - EU studies: household size; comorbidities; population density
 - UK studies: age; occupation; and income*



Findings

- Analysed outcomes:
 - COVID-19 incidence
 - Admission to hospital
 - Mortality
- Most studies reported worse COVID-19 outcomes for ethnic minority groups and groups with low SES
- 3 studies reported no relationship between either of these two variables and COVID-19 outcomes



Conclusions

- Limited number of studies from countries in mainland Europe
- Very few nationwide studies available in countries in Europe
- There is a lack of a common terminology for referring to ethnicity
- Lack of consistent approach for gathering data (SES & Race and ethnicity)

