The Summer of Pain
COVID, politics, and racial discrimination, and pain in the population

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What is pain?

Definition

"Unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with, or resembling that associated with, actual or potential tissue damage."

(IASP 2020)

Types

- Acute
- Chronic
Acute pain vs chronic pain

• Superficially, based on time horizon: less or more than 3 months

• Fundamentally, different phenomena
  • Acute: linked to injury or illness (inflammation)
  • Chronic: persists past healing, or in absence of evident injury/illness
Chronic pain burden

- **Ubiquitous**: Affects more than diabetes, HD, cancer combined.
- **Universal**: Affects all groups in population
- **Impactful**: Most common reason for health care use (80%), for work disability
- **Costly**: > $600,000,000,000 USD annually
- **Studied extensively**: primarily clinical

[Image of a person in a robe lying down, possibly representing chronic pain]
Chronic Pain: Powerful summary measure of population health

Pain inextricably linked with other health dimensions

- Correlated with physical and mental conditions
- Intertwined through the disablement process

Disablement process

1. Disease
2. Impairment
3. Limitations
4. Disability
5. Death
Neglected in population health despite centrality of social factors

Since 2000, articles on pain*

- 3 in Social Science and Medicine
- 2 in JHSB
- 1 in Demography

*All databases, “pain” in title
RQ: Are COVID, politics, and racial reckoning related to pain?

- COVID: health and economic concerns
- Election/political stress
- Racial reckoning (BLM)
Pain measurement in COVID Resilience & Recovery data

Figure 1. Distribution of pain scores in US and Canada.

Estimated weighted, MI logistic models of dichotomized pain (10+)
### What predicts higher odds of (moderate or worse) pain?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
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<td><strong>Model fit (R sq)</strong></td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
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<td>6.9%</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
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</table>
Key correlates of pain -- summary

• Immigrants and Blacks report less & Southerners more pain
• For SES, lower income was linked to more pain
• Net of these known factors, the following also mattered:
  • Psychosocial characteristics (loneliness, life dissatisfaction)
  • Discrimination (race/ethnic or any)
  • COVID, having it or health & economic worries
• No political (stressors) were salient
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COVID, politics, racial discrimination, and pain

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