

## CONVERGE COVID-19 Working Groups for Public Health and Social Sciences Research

### Research Agenda-Setting Paper

*This paper was written to help advance convergence-oriented research in the hazards and disaster field. It highlights areas where additional research could contribute new knowledge to the response to and recovery from the pandemic and other disasters yet to come. Questions about the research topics and ethical and methodological issues highlighted here should be directed to the authors who contributed to this paper.*

#### Working Group Name:

Stigma, Fear, Discrimination, and Backlash in COVID-19

#### Working Group Description:

This Working Group is interested in issues of stigma, fear, discrimination, and backlash in the context of COVID-19, as well as social countermeasures and emergency management actions that can be taken to address these issues. The group's broad scope includes research interests in xenophobia, stigma faced by frontline workers and those that have tested positive, compounded discrimination as experienced by those already marginalized, and the role played by culture and social media.

#### Priority Research Topics and Specific Research Questions:

| Priority Research Topics  | Potential Research Questions   |
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| <p>1. Impact of stigma on pandemic management and relief.</p> <p>We are interested in exploring the overall impact that stigma has had on COVID-19 control and planning. This focus is inspired by past research that shows that stigma often demotivates people from accepting the disease and/or seeking treatment, but also on how discrimination and stigma can result in differential relief outcomes.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>Research Question 1</u>: What is the overall impact of stigma in controlling the COVID-19 pandemic, and what are the implications on planning for future infectious diseases?</li> <li><u>Research Question 2</u>: With respect to COVID-19 management efforts, how do individuals and communities facing pre-existing discrimination experience differential social and political outcomes?</li> </ul> <p><i>*This research topic overlaps/intersects with a number of other topics below (see in particular topics 4 and 5).</i></p> |
| <p>2. Stigma faced by those infected by COVID-19.</p> <p>We are interested in exploring the impacts of COVID-19 on those who have tested positive for the infectious disease, including</p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>Research Question 1</u>: How is the social capital of those who have tested positive for COVID-19 affected, including once they have recovered?</li> <li><u>Research Question 2</u>: Would the donation of plasma of survivors of COVID-19 change the way these individuals are viewed?</li> </ul>   |

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| <p>impacts faced by their family, residential community, and workplace (i.e., courtesy stigma). We are also interested in understanding how survivors who already experience discrimination, such as racism or classism, may be affected differently than others that test positive.</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Research Question 3</u>: What stigma is faced by family members of those who died from COVID-19?</li> <li>• <u>Research Question 4</u>: What are ways in which COVID-19 survivors face compounded challenges based on preexisting discrimination?</li> </ul> <p><i>Case-Study</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Research Question 5</u>: What was the effect of fear when non-symptomatic but positive cruise ship passengers were evacuated to Costa Mesa, CA and Anniston, AL, USA?</li> </ul>  |
| <p>3. Mental and physical health and emotional reactions stemming from harm.</p> <p>We are interested in examining mental, behavioral, and physical health issues associated with discrimination, stigma, and hate associated with COVID-19. Health issues include mental health problems (e.g., depression, anxiety, PTSD, secondary trauma), physical comorbidities (e.g., worsening chronic illnesses, insomnia/sleep disorder), and behavioral issues (e.g., substance use) among individuals, families, and communities amid COVID-19.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Research Question 1</u>: What are the mental and physical health impacts of stigma and discrimination related to COVID-19?</li> <li>• <u>Research Question 2</u>: What is the relationship between COVID-19 and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as experienced by survivors who were also victims of discrimination prior to the pandemic?</li> </ul>   |
| <p>4. Race and ethnicity and COVID-19.</p> <p>Around the world there are many incidences of stigma, fear and discrimination experienced by racial, ethnic, and political minorities. We propose a number of case-studies related to racialized and minority communities and their lived experiences during COVID-19, as well as political instrumentalization as it relates to race and ethnicity (see also topic 5 below, as there are a number of overlaps).</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Research Question 1</u>: How have marginalized and minority communities been targeted—socially, politically, and economically—as a result of COVID-19?</li> <li>• <u>Research Question 2</u>: How is the COVID-19 crisis and associated overtures of stigma and discrimination being exploited to further disempower those already facing political discrimination, diminishment, and erasure, and to accelerate non-egalitarian political aims?</li> </ul> <p><i>Case-Studies</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Research Question 3</u>: What experiences of xenophobia have Asian communities faced during COVID-19, and what is the potential backlash on Asian communities once physical distancing measures are lifted?</li> <li>• <u>Research Question 4</u>: How is COVID-19 being used to discriminate against minority Muslim communities in India?</li> <li>• <u>Research Question 5</u>: How are minority English-speaking communities in Quebec, Canada, affected by discrimination during COVID-19?</li> </ul> |
| <p>5. Public capacity and stigma during COVID-19.</p> <p>As it relates to COVID-19 and public capacity, we are interested in exploring: (a) the role of public officials in perpetuating the spread of stigma during COVID-19; (b) how public officials have used COVID-19 to promote</p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Research Question 1</u>: How have elected officials and/or public health professionals either intentionally or unintentionally perpetuated the spread of stigma during COVID-19?</li> <li>• <u>Research Question 2</u>: How has COVID-19 been used to heighten surveillance and oppression of marginalized groups?</li> <li>• <u>Research Question 3</u>: How might antibody testing and surveillance measures contribute to stigma?</li> </ul>   |

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| <p>discriminatory practices towards marginalized groups; and, (c) how public officials can introduce social counter-measures to address stigma-related issues during COVID-19. Also important for consideration is the role played by non-governmental organizations, non-profit organizations, and tribal communities in the above.</p>                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Research Question 4</u>: What role can public capacity have in developing social counter-measures to address stigma-related issues during COVID-19?</li> <li>• <u>Research Question 5</u>: What is the effect of efforts by officials or leaders in support of minorities stigmatized by COVID-19?</li> </ul>  |
| <p>6. Social media and its relationship to stigma, fear, discrimination, and backlash during COVID-19.</p> <p>Exploring the association of social media with discriminatory targeting of certain communities/populations, and possible counter measures.</p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Research Question 1</u>: How has social media been used to create and perpetuate discrimination during COVID-19? Who are the influencers and what is their impact?</li> <li>• <u>Research Question 2</u>: How do certain social media become hubs of disinformation and misinformation, and how do they perpetuate hate and discrimination in the name of free speech?</li> <li>• <u>Research Question 3</u>: How can online based searches and search term ranking influence discrimination across society?</li> <li>• <u>Research Question 4</u>: What are ways in which social media can be used to counter discrimination during COVID-19?</li> </ul>  |
| <p>7. Resiliency following discrimination related to COVID-19.</p> <p>While our Working Group is interested in exploring issues of stigma, fear, discrimination, and backlash following COVID-19, we also recognize the inherent capacity of communities and individuals to overcome impacts faced. We want to ensure a focus on strength, and not only disparities.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Research Question 1</u>: How are individuals and communities overcoming/tackling the impacts of discrimination related to COVID-19?</li> <li>• <u>Research Question 2</u>: How have targeted groups demonstrated resiliency in response to COVID-19 and its impact more broadly?</li> <li>• <u>Research Question 3</u>: What efforts have been made to improve the resiliency of individuals and communities targeted by discrimination during the pandemic, and what opportunities exist?</li> </ul>  |
| <p>8. Stigma faced by essential workers.</p> <p>While countries all over the world have put in place physical distancing measures, essential workers including medical personnel, support staff, first responders, retail workers, janitorial staff, food suppliers, and drivers, are in most cases required to continue work.</p>                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Research Question 1</u>: How have essential workers been affected by fear and backlash given their disproportionate exposure to COVID-19, and how have they coped?</li> <li>• <u>Research Question 2</u>: What differences in treatment have essential workers faced by those they interact with such as customers or neighbors?</li> <li>• <u>Research Question 3</u>: Have essential workers faced housing discrimination? If so, what forms has the discrimination taken?</li> <li>• <u>Research Question 4</u>: Do essential workers experience stigma differently based on the type of work they conduct, and is there a relationship based on their skill level and workplace?</li> <li>• <u>Research Question 5</u>: Do essential workers face stigma based on their proximity to objects that carry stigma? (Also see topic 9 below.)</li> </ul> |

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| <p>9. Stigma attached to places, objects, and organizations.</p> <p>Discussions about stigma often center around experiences and impacts faced by individuals. We are also interested in exploring impacts of stigma towards places, objects, and organizations. These can include hospitals, public transit, businesses that have experienced outbreaks, and waste products, amongst others.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Research Question 1</u>: What incidents of stigma attached to inanimate objects can be observed during the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., masks)?</li> <li>• <u>Research Question 2</u>: What are the implications of stigma towards places, entities, and organizations (e.g. workplaces, wet markets, health facilities)?</li> <li>• <u>Research Question 3</u>: Does stigma associated with objects transfer to people (e.g., waste generated from COVID-19 and waste workers, and disposal of COVID-19 waste and environmental justice communities)?</li> <li>• <u>Research Question 4</u>: What are the implications of stigma attached to multi-unit residential areas, and shared facilities such as common areas?</li> <li>• <u>Research Question 5</u>: Does public information concerning the local rate of infection in particular neighborhoods affect residents' self-perceptions or local government interventions?</li> </ul> <p><i>Case Study:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Research Question 6</u>: What stigma was attached to masks manufactured in China or Korea when supply chains were stretched thin, and how is this related to racialized/nationalized stigma?</li> </ul> |
| <p>10. Stigma and fear attached to non-human life forms.</p> <p>Discussions about stigma and fear often center around experiences and impacts faced by people. We are also interested in exploring impacts of stigma and fear towards non-human life forms, including pets and livestock.</p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Research Question 1</u>: How are animals being stigmatized due to COVID-19, including wildlife and pets?</li> <li>• <u>Research Question 2</u>: How is pet abandonment during the pandemic related to fear, and what can be learned about how people manage their fear and feelings of uncertainty?</li> <li>• <u>Research Question 3</u>: How are companion animals being used in light of perceived fear of discrimination and stigma?</li> </ul> <p><i>Case Study:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Research Question 4</u>: What dynamics caused perceived linkages between chicken and COVID-19 to result in huge losses for poultry farmers in India?</li> <li>• <u>Research Question 5</u>: What were the implications of the association of salmon with COVID-19, in China?</li> </ul>  |

### **Ethical / Methodological Considerations:**

Given the public health risks posed by the pandemic, many methodologies that would normally have been used to explore issues of stigma, fear, discrimination, and backlash, are no longer applicable, or are complicated. As a result, a number of ethical and methodological considerations are raised. These include finding the appropriate time to engage with individuals, particularly essential workers, on topics as outlined above, and appropriate methods that can be used to better understand the inherently difficult lived experience of individuals facing stigma and discrimination during an already stressful time. With travel and physical distancing restrictions in place, it is difficult for researchers to embed themselves in communities, as required by ethnographic approaches. And, while virtual interviews and electronic surveys can be employed remotely, there is a concern for over-sampling and research fatigue by research participants. Working Group members also report difficulty in reaching specific study populations, such as members of communities of color and/or other small population groups, without appropriate screening techniques. On a theoretical level, ethical concerns are also raised when studying issues of stigma, fear, discrimination, and backlash as it relates to perpetuating racial/ethnic stereotypes in discussions, such as portraying certain ethnic groups as “model minorities.”

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## **Other Frameworks, Considerations for Collaboration, and/or Resources:**

Working Group members have already started collaboration in research since our establishment. Members have submitted proposals and are working on funded projects. We have created a closed shared drive for members and plan to develop a website where members can continue discussing issues associated with our research foci, collaboration opportunities, research progress, and findings.

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