UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON

THE INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH ON
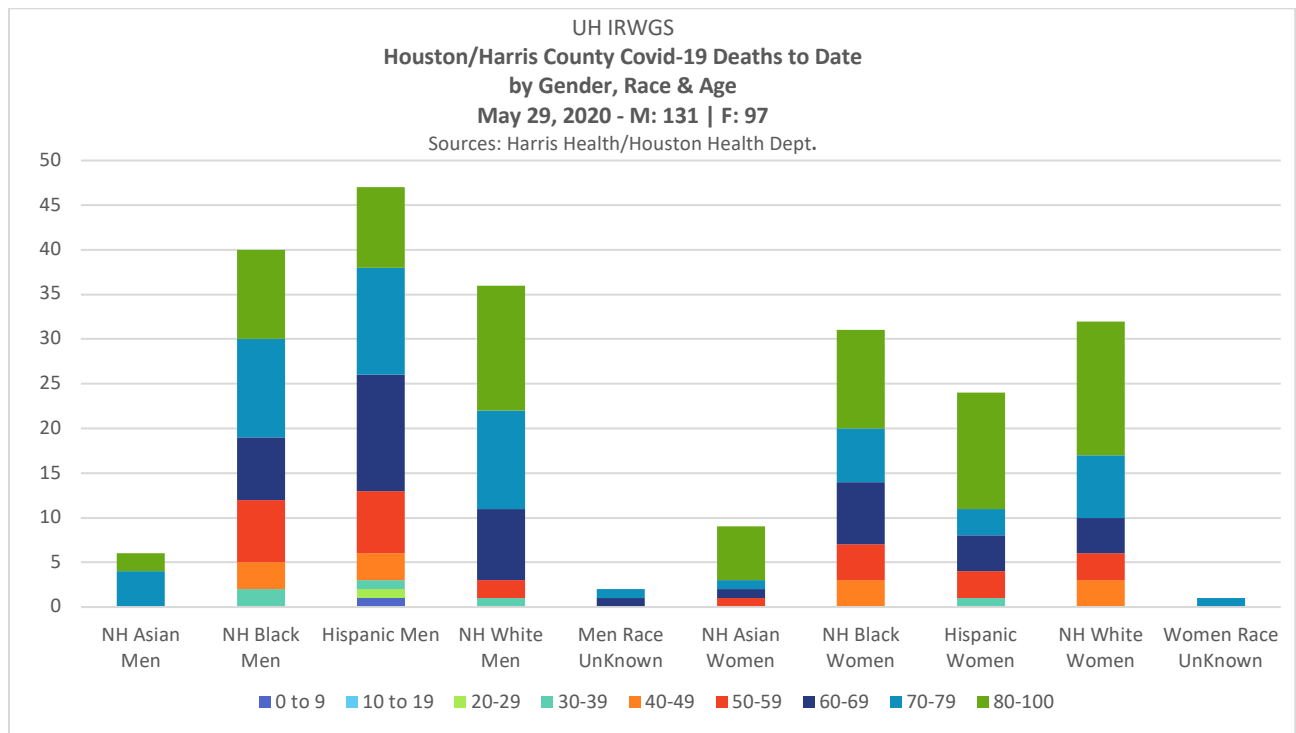## WOMEN, GENDER & SEXUALITY

Pandemic Gender Snapshot - May 30, 2020:
Today's Topic: Houston/Harris County Covid-19 Fatalities by Gender, Race/Ethnicity & Age

Houston/Harris County Covid-19 data reflect the global pattern that more men than women die of the virus.[1] **As of May 29, the 228 fatalities here, broken down by sex, include 131 men | 97 women (57.4% | 42.6%)—a 15% mortality gap, though the reported local infection rate is 50/50**.[2] The H/HC adult population splits 49.2% male | 50.8% female. Since age is a factor in Covid-19 susceptibility and there are more older women than older men, more female deaths overall might be expected—but the same resiliency that allows women to live longer in general seems to be in play with Covid-19 too.[3]

The Houston/Harris County sample set (228) is small, so local trends may shift over time – but thus far the area's gender differential is less stark than in some places. The *Western Journal of Emergency Medicine* reports that in Italy men represent 58% of Covid-19 infections & 70% of Covid-19 deaths, while Wuhan China saw a majority of infections (between 51.0 and 66.7%) among men, with a 1:1.64 female/male ratio of deaths.[4] Respiratory infections SARS (2003) and MERS (2012) also saw sex-linked differentials. Specific cause or causes have not been determined, but some hormonal or genetic protection—from higher rates of estrogen/progesterone or from the double X chromosome—may account for higher rates of female survival. Differential rates of exposure through work outside the home & differences in health-affecting behaviors (mask wearing, handwashing, smoking, etc.) are also potential factors.[5]

Age & race/ethnicity significantly intersect Houston/Harris County Covid-19 gender outcomes, as the Figure below indicates. Each column shows deaths for that Gender/RE group, and the color bands reflect the numbers of deaths by age (NH = non-Hispanic).

UH IRWGS
Houston/Harris County Covid-19 Deaths to Date
by Gender, Race & Age
May 29, 2020 - M: 131 | F: 97
Sources: Harris Health/Houston Health Dept.

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[1] Per the HC/H COVID-19 Dashboard, May 29, 2020. Data on Harris County adult population levels by gender and race herein are based on UH IRWGS analyses of the University of Minnesota's IPUMS USA database for 2018 (most recent available; www.ipums.org).

[2] Per Houston Dept of Health & Harris Health death certificate data. Of 1626 fatalities in Texas to date, Harris tops the county totals at 228. The Texas Dept. of State Health Services currently lists state Covid-19 deaths as 54.7% male | 39% female | 6.3% unknown, as of May 29, 2020.

[3] 60.1% of Covid deaths here (137) involved people 70+: 54% of them male, 46% female, though men comprise only 43% of those 70+ here.

[4] Lauren A. Walter, MD, Alyson J. McGregor, MD. *WJEM* 2020;21(3): 507-509; https://doi.org/10.5811/westjem.2020.4.47536

[5] Maggie Koerth, "Why Are More Men Than Women Dying of Covid-19?" April 30, 2020, Five-Thirty-Eight: https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/why-are-more-men-than-women-dying-of-covid-19/. See also, Reeves & Ford, "Covid-19 much more fatal for men": https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/05/15/covid-19-much-more-fatal-for-men-especially-taking-age-into-account/

Further Analyses of the Figure Above[6]:

1. Relative to their presence in Harris County, Black men (**17.7%** of Harris County adult male population) and Black women (**20.6%** of the county's adult female population) are substantially overrepresented among fatalities (African Americans comprise **30.5%** of male deaths and **31.9%** of female deaths here). Though male numbers are higher, deaths among Black women are also disproportionate relative to other women. Both disparities are attributable to longstanding structural social and economic inequalities—including limited health care access, exposure in frontline jobs, underlying health conditions, and dense housing.[7]

2. The percentage of male deaths represented by White men (**32.8%** of adult male population / **27.5%** of deaths) and Asian men (**7.6%** of adult male population / **4.6%** of deaths) are somewhat lower than their relative presence overall. But the percentage of female deaths represented by White women (**32.3%** of adult female population / **33%** of deaths) and Asian women (**8.2%** of adult female population / **9.3%** of deaths) are roughly equal to their relative presence.

3. Deaths among Hispanic men are also somewhat lower than their presence in the community (**41.9% of** adult male population / **35.9%** of deaths) and among Hispanic women are substantially lower (**38.9%** of adult female population / **24.7%** of deaths). This large gap between Hispanic women's presence in this population and their proportion of deaths invites more research. It may be linked to lower levels of frontline contact.

4. Though Asian women reverse the trend, with higher deaths than Asian men (9 women/6 men), the number of cases is too low to be telling as yet.

5. While deaths among the young are few across the board, they have occurred in larger numbers among Black and Hispanic males under 50 than among White and Asian males in that age group (5, 6, 1, 0, respectively) and among Black and Hispanic males under 40 than all groups of females in that age group.

6. While women have died in lower numbers than men in all age bands through 70-79 (in which band the ratio is 18 women / 39 men), the dynamic reverses in the 80+ band (45 women / 35 men), likely because men represent only 37% of the population of people 80 and over here.

7. We will update this and other data on gender & sexuality issues related to the pandemic in Houston, ongoingly.

UH IRWGS Pandemic Gender Snapshots

Tracking data on gender & sexuality issues related to the pandemic in Houston
/ Harris County, with an intersectional lens.

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[6] Re state comparisons, the Texas Dept of Health presents some race / ethnicity data on Covid-19 deaths, but 23% are listed as "race unknown," so a full picture is not yet available.

[7] The low relative deaths among Hispanic women raises the proportions of deaths among other groups of women. The roughly equal numbers of deaths to Black and White women (31/32) though they represent 20.6% vs. 32.3 % of the population of women, respectively, indicates that disparities also play a part.