



THE IMPACTS OF COVID-19 AMONG RURAL COMMUNITIES

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Rural (non-urban) communities have unique physical and mental health needs compared to their metro or suburban counterparts. These needs could be escalated during natural disasters such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The objective of this study was to assess the physical and mental health burden faced by small rural communities of Texas and identify gaps they have experienced in accessing care during the COVID-19 pandemic. After performing correlational tests, we found no significant association between COVID-19 positivity status and demographic characteristics, except for political affiliation ($p=0.007$), and education was the only variable that was significantly associated with the vaccinated status ($p=0.003$), among other associations explored. In comparison to its metro counterpart, the community surveyed was less affected economically and mentally. Among participants, there was a low COVID-19 positivity rate. Despite this, the study identified a need for increased education surrounding the potential health risks of COVID-19 and COVID-19 vaccination as it was discovered that misconceptions and a lack of knowledge were the leading causes for not getting vaccinated. It was also discovered that the surveyed region's infection rate was on par with both the state and nation positivity rate, but still lagged behind in vaccination numbers. As a final thought, more studies need to be conducted in rural areas to validate this study's findings.