Essence’s Survey on Black Women and Covid-19 Is a ‘Vital’ Resource

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Key insight:

- Black women want more access to food and household goods, as well as educational tools.

The 50th anniversary of Essence was supposed to be a party. The groundbreaking black women’s lifestyle magazine’s annual Essence Festival in New Orleans is already the largest African-American cultural and music event in the U.S., so it’s easy to imagine how lavish this summer’s fest would have been. But given ongoing social distancing measures, the event has gone online and will be livestreamed over the Fourth of July weekend.

Although the expected live celebrations are out, Essence has quickly adapted the magazine’s overall purpose in its 50th year—becoming a crucial resource for information, support and fundraising as the Covid-19 pandemic has hit the African-American community especially hard.

The magazine’s in-house production studio, Essence Studios, launched Essence Wellness House, a streaming video summit of experts ranging from doctors to fitness gurus, meditation instructors and chefs. The series even featured programming

for kids, with LeVar Burton reading children's stories.

In late April, the Essence + New Voices Entrepreneur Virtual Summit brought together business leaders including Bozoma Saint John (CMO of Endeavor), Tina Eskridge (senior marketing director at Microsoft) and Caroline Wanga (chief D&I officer and vp of human resources for Target) to help small business owners strategize, pivot and survive. The magazine also hosted virtual sessions about the Paycheck Protection Program and the CARES Act to help black business owners apply for pandemic assistance.

Just as its own operations have been impacted by the Covid-19 crisis, so has its readership. So Essence took another step in its commitment to helping the community through the pandemic by releasing the first major study on the impact of Covid-19 on black American women.

While statistics have shown that Covid-19 impacts African Americans at higher rates, there has been little research until now on the overall impact—emotional, financial and familial—on black women's well-being.

"Black women comprise just over half of the black population, are one of the most influential and active voting blocs in the U.S., and are heads of household in almost 30% of all black households, which is more than twice the rate for all women," said Richelieu Dennis, founder and chair of Essence Ventures, parent company of Essence magazine. "So, it is vital that we understand what they are thinking, feeling and experiencing as a result of the unprecedented coronavirus pandemic."

The survey offers unprecedented insight into the pandemic's impact, showing that one in four black women personally knows someone who has died from Covid-19, while 44% of black women personally know someone who contracted the disease. The economic impact is worrisome: 70% of black women business owners reported negative trends, and 52% of all black women

surveyed reported negative effects on their work and financial lives.

The survey is packed with marketing insights across product sectors. Black women told Essence they've switched to cooking meals at home (78%), but they're also struggling to access food and household essentials (56%).

Black women told Essence they're spending less on clothing and accessories (61%), jewelry (60%) and luxury items (57%). They're also at a disadvantage when it comes to the sudden shift to home schooling: 85% of black women who are parents said "there are not enough computers or laptops in their household to support the educational needs of their children."

Overall, black women reported few plans to travel for leisure or attend sporting events in the near future. But when it's safe to do so, respondents plan to visit friends and family, engage in outdoor activities and attend religious services.

"The insights gleaned from this data," Dennis said, "should be used to help governments, NGOs and businesses better understand and develop the emergency and relief efforts, recovery and sustainability initiatives, and product and service offerings that will be most critical for black women as they continue to deliver leadership and impact to their households and communities during this crisis and beyond."

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