Tuskegee and the Health of Black Men

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Abstract

JEL Codes: I25, O15 For forty years, the Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in the Negro Male passively monitored hundreds of adult black males with syphilis despite the availability of effective treatment. The study’s methods have become synonymous with exploitation and mistreatment by the medical community. We find that the historical disclosure of the study in 1972 is correlated with increases in medical mistrust and mortality and decreases in outpatient physician interactions for black men. Blacks possessing prior experience with the medical community, including veterans and women, appear to have been less affected by the disclosure. Our findings relate to a broader literature on how beliefs are formed and the importance of trust for economic exchanges involving asymmetric information.

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