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A Pilot Study: Understanding Health Literacy and Linguistic Factors Related to African Immigrants Engagement in Primary Health Care in Massachusetts

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A pilot study: Understanding health literacy and linguistic factors related to African immigrants engagement in primary health care in Massachusetts

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**Background**

- The United States is home to more than 20% of the world immigrant population.
- Massachusetts is ranked 9th among states for percentage of population that is foreign born.
- One of the most prominent groups among the Massachusetts immigrant population is the African immigrant population.
- Immigrants have a higher incidence of low health literacy when compared to the dominant culture.
- Factors associated with low health literacy include: lack of familiarity with US healthcare system, challenges navigating US healthcare system, non-English speaking, less education, low income, chronic health problems, and less use of preventive services.
- Many immigrants claim the U.S. healthcare system is inaccessible and confusing.
- Cultural differences have the potential to influence individual interpretations and perceptions of health and the healthcare system.
- Populations migrating to the U.S. often come with different understandings about health and health care.
- Immigrants’ patterns of health care utilization are different from nonimmigrants.

**Primary Goal and Objectives**

**Primary Goal:** Understand health literacy and the cultural and linguistic differences among African immigrants in Massachusetts as it relates to their use of primary health care services.

**Objectives:**

1. **Identify** African immigrants’ interpretation and understandings of U.S. primary care and health promotion terms and concepts
2. **Assess** African immigrants’ health literacy, acceptability of health literacy measurements, and understanding and comfort with seeking and engaging in primary healthcare services in Massachusetts
3. **Integrate** results into future proposals developing interventions to improve African immigrants use of primary health care within the U.S. healthcare system

**Inclusion Criteria**

**Study Inclusion Criteria**
1. Age 18 or older
2. African immigrants living in MA
3. Able to write and speak English
4. Able and willing to give informed consent

**Methods**

- We are using a CBPR approach to recruit participants and collect data using a cross sectional design
- We are recruiting 100 African immigrants during cultural events, targeted outreach and gatherings in religious communities to complete:
  - a Freelist exercise
  - 2 health literacy assessment tools
  - and a general health survey

**Words Used in the Freelist Exercise**

**General Health Survey**

**Our Team**

To accomplish our goals we assembled a group composed of a health care professional, an anthropologist, two community health leaders, and a senior science major student.

We are a partnership between UMass Graduate School of Nursing, the Multicultural AIDS Coalition-Africans for Improved Access program and Clark University with a senior student from Worcester Polytechnic Institute.

**Outcomes**

Findings will help us gain a preliminary understanding of the primary care health experiences of African immigrants and potential factors that facilitate or hinder their engagement in primary health care.

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