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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

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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