Impact of COVID-19 on African Immigrant Living in New England- A Photovoice Project

Addressing the Health Needs of African Immigrants

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New England African Immigrant Health Research Consortium: The Partnership

• Africans For Improved Access (AFIA) program at the Multicultural AIDS Coalition (MAC)
• Office of Maine Refugee Services (OMRS)
• African Alliance of Rhode Island (AARI)
• New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services - Office of Health Equity (OHE)
• The University of Vermont – Larner College of Medicine (UVM)
• Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services (IRIS)
The Impact of COVID-19 on African Immigrants Living in New England Project

<table>
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<th>Project Rationale</th>
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<td>Greater risk of both acquiring coronavirus and experiencing severe symptoms or death related to COVID-19</td>
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<td>Work in high-contact jobs, which carry higher risk of exposure.</td>
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<td>Information on COVID-19 is not culturally and linguistically appropriate</td>
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<td>Fears related to immigration status</td>
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<td>Mental health challenges due to an inability to adjust or restrictions that prevent them from cultural and religious practices.</td>
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Photovoice Project Goal:

• Provide recommendations to researchers, providers and health care systems for engaging African immigrants into COVID-19 interventions.

Photovoice Project Objectives:


Demographics (N=118)

- Over 75% of participants are English speakers, 15% are Swahili speakers
- Over 75% are female
- 35% are refugees, 22% are permanent residents and 25% US Citizen
- 35% are single and 30% are legally married
- 60% are parents with an average of 4 children
- 25% have no education and aren’t currently enrolled in school
Demographics: Experiences of COVID-19

- 14% tested positive for COVID-19
- 7% experienced symptoms but did not access care
- 30% lost their job

Please note that the percentages do not add up to 100 as the participants could select all answers that apply.
Framing Questions for Photo-taking

1. What was hard for you and/or your family during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. What is your experience accessing COVID-19 testing and seeking care?
3. What is your experience accessing other health services during the COVID-19 pandemic?
4. Where do you get information about COVID-19?
5. How are you addressing and being supported through your challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic?
Themes for Challenges

- Feelings of Loneliness & Isolation
- Restrictive Movement
- Life Changes in the “New” Normal
- Experiencing Loss
- System Challenges
- Fear of the Unknown
- Difficulties for Our Children
- Stress
Photostories: Challenges

Struggles of parents and students - Kids are struggling with distance learning from 9AM-3PM, One day I found my daughter fall asleep on her Chromebook as she got bored and lonely. Also, teachers disturbing parents with calls and messages when student is away form online classes. Sometimes they call parents while they are already at work.

Kids are studying home while some parents are struggling to work from home with the kids causing distraction.
Neglected - These are my children at a Black Lives Matter protest for racial justice. My daughter wanted to go because she is hopeful that there will someday be equality for all people. We must fight for equality by speaking up, by using our voices to be heard. Although this is my 1st protest, fighting for my rights isn't new to me. As a Deaf woman, I'm used to it, like insisting on my right to have a sign interpreter when I see my doctor. I rely on lip reading but now with Covid-19 everyone is required to wear masks to keep safe. This means that since I can no longer read lips I can't follow along in a conversation. Covid-19 has made my life more difficult because there have not been provisions put in place for the Deaf and hard-of-hearing. So I'm here to protest for my right to racial justice, but also for my right to communication access.
The partnership team is still working on analyzing the regional successful strategies but here are some themes that occurred commonly among all states.

Themes for Strategies

- Public Health Guidelines
- Support/Social Connections
- Faith/Religion
- Home remedies
Photostories: Successful Strategies

Blackseed - In Islam black seed is mentioned as superfood and that it’s also used for respiratory conditions including asthma, allergies, cough, bronchitis, flu, swine flu, etc. Black seed is helpful during any sickness. Educate myself and get closer to my religion.
Photostories: Successful Strategies

Keeping the Faith - Coping strategy - prayer, church/fellowship
Strategies for Successful Project Implementation

- Decentralized power to states to accommodate participants needs
- Participants Ongoing Training + Support
- Use interpreters and translated survey instruments
- Community-based Partnership Development
- Computer (virtual platforms) Literacy
Discussion

Based on the challenges and strategies:

What recommendations do you have for researchers, providers and health care systems for engaging African immigrants into COVID-19 interventions?

What stakeholders should be invited to the townhall to solidify recommendations?

What opportunities are available to disseminate findings from the project?
Next Steps for the Project

- Continue participatory data analysis
- Convene a townhall to solidify recommendations (March 2021)
- Disseminate findings
  - Traveling exhibit
  - Manuscripts
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