

# 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 9<sup>th</sup> 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.



Siede Slopadoe demonstrating use of a female condom at a study recruitment event

## 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:

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

## 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.



## Inclusion Criteria

### Study Inclusion Criteria

- Age 18 or older
- African immigrants living in MA
- Able to write and speak English
- 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

1. In what country were you born?  
 2. Did you live in any other country besides the one you were born in before moving to the United States?  
 3. How long did you live in the United States?  
 4. How old were you when you moved to the United States?  
 5. What is your current immigration status?  
 6. How many times have you visited your country of origin during the last 12 months?

### Health Literacy Assessment Tools

Health Literacy Skills Instrument

Question	Yes	No	Don't Know
1. I can understand what the doctor says.			
2. I can read and understand the information on the medicine bottle.			
3. I can understand what the doctor says about my health.			
4. I can understand what the doctor says about my health.			
5. I can understand what the doctor says about my health.			
6. I can understand what the doctor says about my health.			
7. I can understand what the doctor says about my health.			
8. I can understand what the doctor says about my health.			
9. I can understand what the doctor says about my health.			
10. I can understand what the doctor says about my health.			

**HEALTH LITERACY SKILLS INSTRUMENT**  
 Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. This survey includes questions on topics related to health and health care. First, you will read, view, or hear some health-related information. Then you will be asked some questions related to the information. The purpose of this survey is to find out what most people think and understand about some health care issues. If you do not know the answer to a question, then it is okay to check the box that says "Don't know." Some of the questions use names of people who are not real.

- Results of the Freelist exercise will inform development of an interview for **3 focus groups with African immigrants** focused on understanding their experiences accessing and using primary health care services in MA.
- We are also **assessing the feasibility and acceptability of 2 health literacy instruments** to determine the appropriateness of using these assessments with an immigrant population.

## 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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