



Well-Being Study to Compare Mental and Overall Health Among Haitian and Haitian American Groups

The Haitian Well-Being Study, in development at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine, is a labor of love. “I was born, raised, and trained in Haiti,” said Judite Blanc, Ph.D., assistant professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at the Miller School. “So Haiti is really dear and close to my heart.”

Dr. Blanc has studied the impact of systemic stressors like economic challenges and natural disasters, including the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. She joined the Miller School in mid-2021, “with the same dream and with the same goal.”



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the impact of systemic stressors such as economic difficulties and natural disasters, including the 2010 earthquake in Haiti.

Florida is home to the largest Haitian American population in the United States. Dr. Blanc is looking forward to the local field work.

“You have to go to their community,” she said. “When this community sees someone who looks like them and who goes into their environment speaking to them in Haitian Creole, they are more likely to trust you.”

The Center for Translational Sleep and Circadian Sciences (TSCS) at the Miller School is home to the project. Girardin Jean-Louis, Ph.D., director of the TSCS, is a study co-investigator.

The large, prospective study aims first to identify the most important mental health, overall health, and sleep-related factors through focus groups. The researchers will also look at factors including employment, education level, income, immigration status, gender, genomic factors, and type and level of traumatic event exposure.

The results will then inform a survey designed to evaluate the impact of specific stressful factors among larger numbers of Haitians and Haitian Americans. The project could also reveal differences between Haitians, Haitian immigrants to the United States, and Haitian American U.S. citizens who may be more acclimated to the culture in this country. “We know that acculturation has an impact on immigrant minority population



health status,” Dr. Blanc said.

The ultimate goal is to enroll 1,000 participants in the study. Depending on funding, the study could follow even more people for up to 10 years to note any changes. The hope is that focus group feedback and survey responses will lead to effective solutions to boosting the well-being of Haitian populations.

Studying Neurologic Risks

The project has already expanded to two other research sites. Dr. Blanc is working with Ernest Barthelemy, M.D., M.P.H., principal investigator for the project at the SUNY Downstate site in Brooklyn, and with Evan Auguste, principal investigator at University of Massachusetts in Boston.

Dr. Barthelemy explained that rates of traumatic brain injury and stroke are disproportionately high in the Haitian population. For example, according to CDC global health data, stroke is the second-leading cause of death in Haiti. More robust research is needed to determine why Haitian populations have these higher health risks, he said.

When asked what he hopes comes out of the project, Dr. Barthelemy said: “Health equity.”

Mr. Auguste, incoming assistant professor of psychology at UMass, is developing a scale to measure anti-Haitian discrimination as part of the project. “When we look at existing measures, the scales of discrimination are either based on broad stress models or they’ve been amended from African American experiences of discrimination,” he said.

He is enthusiastic about collaborating with Dr. Blanc. She is



“one of the few people really engaging with the idea of historical trauma from a psychological perspective and health perspective on Haitian mental health,” Mr. Auguste said.

For more information on the Haitian Well-Being Study, call 305-243-7452 or e-mail Haitianstudy@miami.edu.

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