

Acculturation and Diet among Afro Caribbean Immigrants: Impact on Health

Monique Constance-Huggins, PhD MSW, MPIA

Afro-Caribbean migrants represent a noticeable share of the immigrant population in the United States. They account for 50% of the Black immigrant population in the U.S. (Anderson, 2015). Despite this, little is known about their social and economic outcomes as their conditions are often aggregated with all immigrants or American-born Blacks. One of the social areas that is gaining increasing focus is the impact of diet on health outcomes among Blacks. For example, researchers are exploring the linkage between diet and diseases such as diabetes and heart disease, which disproportionately affect Blacks. The increasing diversity within Blacks, however, begs that greater attention be placed on sub-groups such as Afro-Caribbean immigrants. This is necessary to provide a more complete picture of Black health and to provide more appropriate interventions to address the needs of sub-groups. This presentation adds to this literature by exploring the socio-economic factors that affect the diet of Afro-Caribbean immigrants.

The impact of diet on the health of Afro-Caribbean immigrants can be examined through three factors. First, the change in social location. The reality that there is a shift in their social location from being members of a dominant group in the Caribbean to now being a racial minority in the U.S. can lead to feelings of disempowerment and confusion. This can in turn impact their self-image which can be manifested in poor food choices. A second and related factor is discrimination based on race. While in the U.S. Afro-Caribbean immigrants are socially constructed as racial minorities and consequently are faced with many new struggles related to their race. For example, they may experience discrimination in areas such as housing, employment, and health which can negatively impact their outcomes in these areas. This ultimately impacts their economic status. For example 18% of Afro-Caribbean immigrants are poor which is higher than the overall U.S. poverty rate of 12.3% (U.S. Census, 2017). This consequently impacts their access to healthy food.

A third factor is the change in lifestyle. Afro-Caribbean immigrants have to make adjustments in their pace of living, in order to survive in the American context. This adjustment includes, working in multiple jobs, working for longer hours, cooking less, and spending less time socializing and exercising. These adjustments could lead to acculturative stress. According to (Berry, 2006) acculturative stress is the emotional strain resulting from efforts to conform to a new culture. This can impact the quality of their diet and consequently their health. In fact, existing data suggest that Afro-Caribbean immigrants became ill from simply switching their diet to a more American diet (Bramble, Llwellyn, & Simpson, 2013). This presentation will shed further light on the impact of these factors on the diet and health of Afro-Caribbean immigrants.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the presentation, audience members should be able to;

1. Articulate acculturative stress
2. Describe the social and economic changes experienced by Afro-Caribbean immigrants
3. Describe the impact of acculturative stress on diet

References

- Anderson, M. (2015). A rising share of the U.S. Black population is foreign born. Retrieved from the Pew Research Center. <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2015/04/09/chapter-1-statistical-portrait-of-the-u-s-black-immigrant-population/>
- Bramble J., Llwellyn, C., & Simpson, G. (2013). Eating as a cultural expression of caring among Afro-Caribbean and African American Women: Understanding the cultural dimensions of obesity. *Journal of Healthcare for the Poor and Underserved*. 20 (2) 53-68.
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2017). Retrieved from [https://www.census.gov/topics/income-poverty/poverty.html](https://www.census.gov/topics/income-poverty/poverty/poverty.html)

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