

# Contextualizing the Survivorship Experiences of Haitian Immigrant Women With Breast Cancer: Opportunities for Health Promotion

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**W**idespread adoption of mammography and increased treatment efficacy has reduced morbidity and mortality from breast cancer significantly among women in the United States (Lewis et al., 2010). However, that decline has not been equitable across different ethnic groups. Foreign-born minorities continue to be affected disproportionately by adverse disease outcomes, in part because of advanced stage of disease at diagnosis (Gany, Shah, & Changrani, 2006; Saint-Jean & Crandall, 2005). In the United States, recent immigrants and ethnic minorities tend to be diagnosed with late-stage (stages III and IV) breast cancer, for which the prognosis for survival is poor (Echeverria & Carrasquillo, 2006; Kobetz et al., 2010; Summers, Saltzstein, Blair, Tsukamoto, & Sadler, 2010).

A growing body of research has documented the implications of late-stage diagnosis and breast cancer survivorship among ethnically diverse women (Ashing-Giwa, Padilla, Bohórquez, Tejero, & Garcia, 2006; Chung, Cimprich, Janz, & Mills-Wisneski, 2009; Gibson & Hendricks, 2006). However, Haitian immigrants, who are among one of the fastest growing Black ethnic groups in the United States (Gany, Trinh-Shevrin, & Aragones, 2008), are a notable omission from the literature. The current study aimed to fill that gap. The current article will describe data from a series of focus groups conducted with Haitian immigrant women breast cancer survivors to document the unique barriers they face in managing their disease and to understand the impact of such barriers on their survivorship experiences.

## Methods

### Community-Based Participatory Research

The current study was conducted as part of an ongoing community-based participatory research (CBPR) initiative in Little Haiti, a community in Miami, FL. CBPR is a research methodology, increasingly popular

**Purpose/Objectives:** To examine challenges faced by Haitian immigrant women managing a breast cancer diagnosis.

**Research Approach:** Trained community health workers conducted focus groups with Haitian women who were breast cancer survivors. A grounded theory approach guided analysis of transcripts.

**Setting:** A large community-based organization in Miami, FL.

**Participants:** 18 women took part in three focus groups. Participants were 40 years or older, were ethnically Haitian, and had been diagnosed with breast cancer 6–12 months prior to the study.

**Methodologic Approach:** Data were collected as part of an ongoing community-based participatory research initiative in Little Haiti, the largest enclave of Haitian settlement in Miami, FL. Community health workers, integral to the initiative, recruited participants through their extensive social networks and community contacts.

**Main Research Variables:** Screening knowledge, illness beliefs, social and economic consequences of a breast cancer diagnosis, and advice for breast health education.

**Findings:** Emergent themes suggest that Haitian breast cancer survivors face multiple challenges, including misperceptions about screening guidelines, disease etiology, and risk; a reduced capacity to earn a living because of physical debility; and diminished social support.

**Conclusions:** Future research must continue to examine the impact of breast cancer on Haitian immigrant women and identify key strategies, such as community outreach and support programs, to improve their quality of life.

**Interpretation:** Nurses can play an essential role in such strategies by providing culturally relevant clinical care and partnering with community stakeholders to define the scope and focus of public health intervention.

in nursing, public health, and medicine, that invites community participation throughout the research process, from study conceptualization to dissemination of findings (Israel et al., 2003). Accordingly, CBPR reflects, and often is grounded in, community members' socio-cultural orientation to health and disease prevention,