

African Immigrants in the Low Wage Health Care Labor Market:
Incorporation and Poverty

Grant Application Submitted by: Yolanda Covington-Ward, PhD

Project Abstract

The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that health care support and personal care and services occupations will have the largest projected growth (34.5% and 26.8%, respectively) of all major occupation groups between 2010 and 2020. The numbers of immigrants in the health care work force are steadily growing, and about 40% of African immigrants in health care work in low wage health care support occupations. The purpose of this project is to use qualitative individual interviews with a subset of African immigrants and refugees in Pittsburgh in order to advance research on the entry, experiences, and occupational mobility of African immigrants in low wage direct care occupations. This study will make several contributions to the literature on labor markets, immigrants, and poverty. First, this project focuses on workers in low wage health care support and personal care occupations, which are projected to be the fastest growing occupations between 2010 and 2020. Second, this project focuses on African immigrants, a group that is largely understudied in regards to labor market research, as much of the existing literature deals with Latino and Asian immigrants. Third, this project examines African immigrants in low wage direct care occupations, an area that has been overlooked in favor of research on physicians and nurses in higher paid health care occupations. Fourth, while much of the literature on low wage direct care is based on quantitative data, this project uses qualitative methods in order to capture the multi-level factors that influence African immigrant participation in this area of the labor market.

African Immigrants in the Low Wage Health Care Labor Market:

Incorporation and Poverty

Project Narrative

Overview

The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that health care support and personal care and services occupations will have the largest projected growth (34.5% and 26.8%, respectively) of all major occupation groups between 2010 and 2020. The numbers of immigrants in the health care work force are steadily growing, and about 40% of African immigrants in health care work in low wage health care support occupations (McCabe 2012). The purpose of this project is to advance research on the entry, experiences, and occupational mobility of African immigrants in low wage direct care occupations. Using qualitative data collected through individual interviews, I will take a multi-level approach to examine micro (individual), group (social networks) and macro level factors (resettlement employment policies) that may influence the growing numbers of African immigrants in these low wage occupations.

Low Wage Health Care and Immigration

This rapid growth is directly related to the aging of the American population, resulting in an expanding need for direct care workers to care for the elderly in both institutional and home settings. Moreover, the nationwide expansion of access to health care services and direct care through legislation—namely, the Affordable Care Act—will also drive growth in these occupations. Within the larger occupational groupings of health care support and personal care occupations, the number of low wage direct care workers who are personal care and home health aides is expected to grow by 70.5% and 69.4%, placing them at the top of the both the fastest and

the largest growing occupations in the United States (Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Outlook handbook, 2012-2013). Nursing aides and attendants are also among the occupations with the largest projected growth, with a projection of a 20.1% increase in workers between 2010 and 2020. While demand for these types of workers is increasing, their salaries remain very low. The 2012 mean annual wage of \$22,910 for health care support and \$19,100 for personal care and service occupations (BLS, Occupational Wage Estimates, May 2012) places workers in these occupations below or near the poverty level (\$23,050 for a family of four in 2012).

While an aging population and an expansion of access to health services and direct care are driving growth in the low wage health care labor market, immigrants are making up more and more of the workers. Foreign born workers made up 16% of the overall health care workforce in 2010, similar to their distribution in the overall civilian work force (McCabe 2012). However, between 2001 and 2009, the foreign born workforce in personal care and service, and nursing, psychiatric, and home health aide jobs grew by 231.3% and 47%, respectively (Lowell 2012). While African immigrants make up 10% of the foreign born population working in health care more generally, nearly 40% of these African immigrant workers can be found in the low wage health care support occupations (McCabe 2012).

Significance of Project

This project brings together research on two core themes of the Center for Poverty Research—labor markets, immigration, and their relation to poverty. This study will make several contributions to the literature on labor markets, immigrants, and poverty. First, this project focuses on workers in low wage health care support and personal care occupations, which are projected to be the fastest growing occupations between 2010 and 2020. Second, this project focuses on African immigrants, a group that is largely understudied in regards to labor market

research, as much of the existing literature deals with Latino and Asian immigrants. Third, this project examines African immigrants in low wage direct care occupations, an area that has been overlooked in favor of research on physicians and nurses in higher paid health care occupations (Dovlo 2007; Johnson 2005; Westley and Dobal 2009; Showers 2013). Fourth, while much of the literature on low wage direct care is based on quantitative data, this project uses qualitative methods in order to capture the multi-level factors that influence African immigrant participation in this area of the labor market. Moreover, such a methodological approach will also enable me to explore the survival strategies that are used by African immigrants to get by on such low wages.

Project Questions and Hypotheses

The questions that I am using to shape this project emerge out of qualitative research (participant observation, focus groups, and individual interviews) that I have previously conducted among Liberian immigrants in Pittsburgh on the topic of identity formation. There is a small community of Liberians who were resettled in Pittsburgh as refugees, and many of these Liberians (based on results from a community survey), along with other African refugees in Pittsburgh from Sudan and Burundi, among other countries, have taken jobs in low wage health care and personal care occupations. Based on these preliminary findings, this project is guided by three major questions:

What are the larger national and state level trends of African immigrants in low wage direct care work? While existing research has demonstrated that Black African immigrants are among the most highly educated in the country, they often experience education-occupation mismatch, working in jobs beneath their education level and learning lower wages than other similar educated immigrants (Thomas 2010). Using data from the American Community Survey, I will

investigate the geographical distribution of African immigrants in these occupations, and look at trends in their race, gender, educational backgrounds, country or origin, citizenship status, and income. My hypothesis is that states that have received a large share of African refugee populations will have more Africans working in low wage direct care work. From 2001 to 2010, Africans made up 28.4% of total refugee arrivals and 21.2% of all individuals granted asylum (McCabe 2011). Due to government pressure to find work immediately upon arrival, many of these refugees turn to low wage direct care occupations.

What are the multi-level factors that influence the entry, everyday experiences, and chances for occupational mobility of Africans in low wage direct care occupations? I will conduct and analyze the individual interviews of 30 African workers in low wage direct care (both male and female) from several different countries in order to explore the role of individual choice, social networks, and institutional guidance in affecting their participation in these occupations. While there is some existing literature on the impact of race (Berdes and Eckert 2001; Dodson and Zinbavage 2007) and immigrant status (Lowell, Martin and Stone 2010; Ortega, Carneiro and Flyholm 2010) on the everyday experiences of low wage direct care workers, there is a gap in the literature in addressing the experiences of workers who are racially Black African immigrants. I hypothesize that Black African immigrants will have to deal with racial discrimination, animosity against immigrants more generally, and negative stereotypes about Africans more specifically, all of which can affect their work environment and opportunities for advancement.

What are the strategies that African immigrants use to support themselves and their families in low wage direct care occupations?

Through the qualitative individual interviews, I will also explore the strategies that African immigrants use for financial and other support in the context of low wage occupations. I

hypothesize that other African immigrants from one's country of origin will play a crucial role in social as well as financial support.

Methods

For the first phase of my project, I will analyze data from the American Community Survey with SPSS in order to find larger trends in African immigrant participation in the low wage direct care labor market. The second phase of my project is based on doing qualitative semi-structured individual interviews with African immigrants and refugees in Pittsburgh who work in these occupations. Pittsburgh is a city with a large elderly population, a significant number of both African immigrants and refugees, and due to my existing connections with multiple African communities (I am on the advisory board of the Union of African Communities, the umbrella organization for all of the African communities in Southwestern PA), the larger Pittsburgh metropolitan area will serve as a useful site for examining the experiences of African immigrants in low wage direct care work. I will conduct 30 interviews with Africans from different countries of origin on the topic of their entry and experiences in these occupations. I will use Nvivo, a qualitative data analysis software program to analyze and code the interview transcripts for inductive themes that emerge from the data.

Policy Relevance

The economic incorporation of all immigrants is the goal of our national immigration policy, so if there is evidence that certain groups of immigrants are being guided to low wage work and have few opportunities for occupational mobility, the findings from this study can be used to affect change in immigrant resettlement policy and programs for occupational mobility in low wage direct care work.

Bibliography

- (OECD), Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. "A Profile of Immigrant Populations in the 21st Century: Data from Oecd Countries." In *Database on Immigrants*, 200: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Publication Date 20 Feb 2008.
- Aiken , Linda H., James Buchan, Julie Sochalski, Barbara Nichols, and Mary Powell. "Trends in International Nurse Migration." *Health Affairs* 23, no. 3 (2004): 69-77.
- Apraku, Kofi. *African Emigres in the United States: A Missing Link in Africa's Social and Economic Development*. New York: Praeger, 1991.
- Berdes, Celia, and John M. Eckert. "Race Relations and Caregiving Relationships: A Qualitative Examination of Perspectives from Residents and Nurse's Aides in Three Nursing Homes." *Research on Aging* 23, no. 1 (2001): 109-26.
- Brush, Barbara L.. "Imported Care: Recruiting Foreign Nurses to U.S. Health Care Facilities." By Anne M. Berger. *Health Affairs* 23, no. 3 (2004): 78-87.
- Creese, Gillian, and Brandy Wiebe. "'Survival Employment': Gender and Deskilling among African Immigrants in Canada." *International Migration* 50, no. 5 (2012): 56-76.
- Dodson, Lisa, and Rebekah M. Zinavage. "It's Like a Family": Caring Labor, Exploitation, and Race in Nursing Homes." *Gender and Society* 21, no. 6 (2007): 905-28.
- Donkor, Martha. "Marching to the Tune: Colonization, Globalization, Immigration, and the Ghanaian Diaspora." *Africa Today* 52, no. 1 (2005): 27-44.
- Dovlo, Delanyo. "Migration of Nurses from Sub-Saharan Africa: A Review of Issues and Challenges." *Health Services Research* 42, no. 3 (2007): 1373-88.
- Duff, Patricia, A., Ping Wong, and Margaret Early. "Learning Language for Work and Life: The Linguistic Socialization of Immigrant Canadians Seeking Careers in Healthcare." *The Modern Language Journal* 86, no. 3 (2002): 397-422.
- Duffy, Mignon. "Reproducing Labor Inequalities: Challenges for Feminists Conceptualizing Care at the Intersections of Gender, Race, and Class." *Gender and Society* 19, no. 1 (2005): 66-82.
- Duffy, Mignon, Randy Albelda, and Clare Hammonds. "Counting Care Work: The Empirical and Policy Applications of Care Theory." *Social Problems* 60, no. 2 (2013): 145-67.
- Dwyer, James. "What's Wrong with the Global Migration of Health Care Professionals?: Individual Rights and International Justice." In *The Hastings Center Report*, 36-43: The Hastings Center, 2007.

- England, Paula. "Emerging Theories of Care Work." *Annual Review of Sociology* (2005): 381-99.
- Fisher, Lucy T., and Margaret I. Wallhagen. " day-to-Day Care: The Interplay of Cnas' Views of Residents & Nursing Home Environments ". *Journal of Gerontological Nursing* 34, no. 11 (2008).
- Jervis, Lori L. "The Pollution of Incontinence and the Dirty Work of Caregiving in a U. S. Nursing Home." *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 15, no. 1 (2001): 84-99.
- Johnson, James. "Stopping Africa's Medical Brain Drain: The Rich Countries of the North Must Stop Looting Doctors and Nurses from Developing Countries." *BJM (Clinical research ed.)* 331, no. 7507 (2005): 2-3.
- Kalleberg, Arne L. "Precarious Work, Insecure Workers: Employment Relations in Transition." *American Sociological Review* 74, no. 1 (2009): 1-22.
- Kasinitz, Philip, John Mollenkopf, and Mary C. Waters. " becoming American/Becoming New Yorkers: immigrant Incorporation in a Majority Minority City ". *International Migration Review* 36, no. 4 (2002): 1020-36.
- Leana, Carrie R., Vikas Mittal, and Emily Stiehl. "Perspective—Organizational Behavior and the Working Poor." *Organization Science* 23, no. 3 (2012): 888-906.
- Lowell, B. Lindsay, Susan Martin, and Robyn Stone. "Ageing and Care Giving in the United States: Policy Contexts and the Immigrant Workforce." *Journal of Population Ageing* 3, no. 1-2 (2010): 59-82.
- McCabe, Kristen. "African Immigrants in the US" In *Migration Information Source*: Migration Policy Institute, 2011.
- McCabe, Kristen. "Us in Focus: Foreign-Born Health Care Workers in the United States " In *Migration Information Source*: Migration Policy Institute, 2012.
- Meghani, Zahra, and Lisa Eckenwiler. "Care for the Caregivers?: Transnational Justice and Undocumented Non-Citizen Care Workers." *International Journal of Feminist Approaches to Bioethics* 2, no. 1 (2009): 77-101.
- Milan, Vesely. "West Lures African Nurses." *African Business* (2004): 26-29.
- Milkman, Ruth. "Immigrant Workers and the Future of American Labor." *The Labor Lawyer* 26, no. 2 (2011): 295.
- "Nursing Aides, Home Health Aides, and Related Health Care Occupations." edited by National Center for Health Workforce Analyses, IV-153, 2004.

- "Nursing Workforce: Recruitment and Retention of Nurses and Nurse Aides Is a Growing Concern." In *Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions*, 2001.
- Oreopoulos, Philip. "Why Do Skilled Immigrants Struggle in the Labor Market?: A Field Experiment with Six Thousand Resumes ", 1-47: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2009.
- Ortega, Adriana, Isabella Gomes Carneiro, and Mari-Ann Flyvholm. "A Descriptive Study on Immigrant Workers in the Elderly Care Sector." *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health* 12, no. 5 (2010): 699-706.
- Porter, Eduardo. "Immigration and the Labor Market." *The New York Times*. Published electronically 25 June 2013.
- Portes, Alejandro, Donald Light, and Patricia Fernández-Kelly. "The U.S. Health System and Immigration: An Institutional Interpretation ". *Sociological Forum* 24, no. 3 (2009): 487-514.
- Pratt, Geraldine. "From Registered Nurse to Registered Nanny: Discursive Geographies of Filipina Domestic Workers in Vancouver, B.C." *Economic Geography* 75, no. 3 (1999): 215-36.
- Reinhard, Susan, Donald Redfoot, and Brenda Cleary. "Health and Long-Term Care: Are Immigrant Workers Indispensable?". *Generations* 32, no. 4 (2008): 24-30.
- Ryosho, Natsuko. "Experiences of Racism by Female Minority and Immigrant Nursing Assistants." *Affilia* 26, no. 1 (2011): 59-71.
- Seetoo, Rob. "City Church Embraces African Immigrants." August 28, 2003.
- Showers , Fumilayo. "*Nursing the Nation: Globalization, Gender, Race, State and African Immigrant Women in Health Care Work in the United States of America.*" Syracuse University, 2013.
- Statistics, Bureau of Labor. "Occupational Outlook Handbook." edited by U.S. Department of Labor, 2012-13
- Thomas, Kevin J. "Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Education-Occupation Mismatch Status Among Immigrants in South Africa and the United States." *International Migration and Integration* (2010) 11:383-401.
- Ubokudom, Sunday E. *United States Health Care Policymaking: Ideological, Social and Cultural Differences and Major Influences*. New York: Springer 2012.
- Westley , Yvonne, RN, PhD, FAAN, and May T. Dobal, PhD, RN. "Nurses of African Descent and Career Advancement ". *Journal of Professional Nursing* 25, no. 2 (2009): 122-26.

Worth, Tammy. "Helping Seniors Live at Home Longer: The New Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act Aims to Provide at-Home Alternatives to Nursing Home Care " *Los Angeles Times*, June 19, 2011.