

# Understanding Distinctive Beliefs and Perceptions about Depression among Haitian Men

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## Abstract

This is a quantitative analysis exploring the relationship between levels of depression in Haitian men as related to restrictive emotionality, self-reliance, subjective masculine stress, spiritual well-being, and length of time in the United States. The data were obtained from demographic questionnaires and surveys among 90 Haitian men residing in the United States.

## Problem

There are no research data available on depression among Haitian men. In the field of psychology, there has been a paucity of research and clinical knowledge available on the mental health of Haitian women and no data on Haitian men. Consequently, there is a disparity regarding information critical to conduct culturally relevant assessments, diagnosis, and treatments (Nicolas et al., 2007). The catastrophic earthquake that struck Haiti in January 2010 compounded mental health problems for thousands of Haitians, and particularly vulnerable were individuals suffering with pre-existing mental problems (WHO & PAHO, 2010). Despite the resilience of the Haitian people, the population has had to cope with mounting risk factors for mental health problems: exposure to severe loss and trauma, poverty, basic unaddressed psychosocial needs, ongoing sexual and other violence, massive material and personal losses, uncertainty about the future, family disruptions, and limited community services (PAHO & WHO, 2011). In order to explore the severity of depression among Haitian people, especially among males, the problems this research explored provide a beginning foundation toward understanding some of the cultural manifestations of depression in Haitian men. This research hopefully will encourage additional empirical research that will expand the literature and lead to an understanding of this population.

## Purpose

This study provides an investigation into depression as it appears among Haitian men living in the United States. This study will hopefully encourage further empirical research on depression and mental health issues affecting Haitian men.

## Relevant Literature

Bandura's social learning theory and Mahalik's biopsychosocial framework provided the theoretical foundation for this investigation.

Bandura theorized that we mimic behaviors that are pre-determined within our environment. The concept of learning from looking at people in one's environment has frequently been referred to as a connector between behaviorist and cognitive learning concepts because it covers concentration, recall, and personal drive (Bandura, 1977).

Men learn to restrict their emotions and conform to the hegemonic western culture masculine role. This is true among Haitian men as well.

## Research Questions

1. Does restrictive emotionality impact Haitian men's beliefs about depression?
2. Does self-reliance impact Haitian men's beliefs about depression?
3. Does subjective masculine stress impact Haitian men's beliefs about depression?
4. Does spiritual well-being associated with Voodoo impact Haitian men's beliefs about depression?
5. What is the effect that time of residency in the United States has on restrictive emotionality among Haitian men?
6. What is the effect that time of residency in the United States has on self-reliance among Haitian men?
7. What effect does length of time in the United States have on subjective masculine stress among Haitian men?
8. What effect does length of time in the United States have on spirituality associated with Voodoo?
9. Can higher levels of spirituality, as related to the practices of Voodoo, predict higher levels of depression for Haitian men?
10. Can spirituality, as related to the practices of Voodoo, affect levels of self-disclosure?

## Procedures

The data were obtained from questionnaires, surveys, and interviews completed by 90 Haitian men residing in the United States between the ages of 20 to 40 years old. Each participant had an appointment with the researcher at an approved location and took the MRNI-SF in private and anonymously.

## Data Analysis

Multiple Regression Analysis  
One Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

## Findings

The first three hypotheses were supported by the MRNI-SF sub-scores. The MRNI-SF sub-scores measured restrictive emotionality expression of traditional masculinity norms regarding emotional disclosures by internalizing self-perceptions. The Self-Reliance sub-scale measured the significant influence of culture and defining characteristics of masculinities, including the dominant hegemonic construct of masculinity (Hammond, 2012).

Respondents who reported greater levels of spirituality associated with Voodoo and or as related to the practices of Voodoo did not show greater level of depression.

With regards to the effect that length of residency in the United States had on restrictive emotionality and self-reliance, both hypotheses were supported by participants' responses.

Restrictive emotionality, self-reliance and length of time in the United States correlated with significant levels of depression. Correlations between spirituality and depression measures were statistically significant.

Younger Haitian men reported significantly greater levels of spirituality, although they did not report greater levels of depression. Levels of spirituality, as related to the practices of Voodoo, showed no effect with levels of self-disclosure.

## Limitations

One of the limitations of the study was the void in literature on the subject of depression in Haitian men. A second limitation was that the study included only Haitian men who currently reside in the United States. A third limitation was there were no available descriptive statistical analysis data to show any results for comparison or to examine results; therefore, results cannot be stated with true accuracy whether masculine norms influence symptoms of depression and reluctance to self-disclose feelings due to the misconceptions about spirituality associated with Voodoo and depression. Furthermore, a fourth limitation was that Voodoo's reputation has been tarnished by association with bad magic or evil and the consequences of Voodoo (Destroies & St. Fleurose, 2002). A fifth limitation was that the respondent's age may or may not be related to the dependent variables. There were no descriptive statistical analysis to relate and compare limitations of internal and external validity, construct validity, and confounder variables.

## Conclusions

Haitian men would be more open to seek help for their depression/sadness/mental health problems if the professional personnel offering them psychological assistance approached Haitian men with cultural competency and with an unbiased attitude.

Culturally competent mental health professionals can assist Haitian men without discrimination, biases and stereotypical ideas popularized by western cultural perspectives.

## Social Change Implications

This study provided initial data on depression in Haitian men to the existing void in mental health literature. It educates mental health professionals about the myths and half-truths promoted in movies and media about Haitian people and Haitian culture.

This study assists Haitian men to seek help and to diminish the stigma attached to seeking help for depression.

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