

Lack of Trust in Healthcare among African Immigrants in Florida: Impact, Contributing Factors, and Potential Solutions

BACKGROUND

- It is reported that trust in U.S. healthcare declined swiftly, moving down from 73% of residents having confidence in the healthcare system and medical leaders in 1966 to only 34% of residents in 2012 and 18% in 2017 (Khullar, 2019).
- Although lack of trust in healthcare is prevalent across populations in the U.S., research shows that the problem is deep-rooted and remains complex among minoritized and underserved communities (Webb Hooper et al., 2019). For example, compared to non-Hispanic Whites, non-Hispanic Black individuals are less likely to trust their physicians and are more likely to be worried about personal privacy and the potential for harmful experimentation in hospitals (Boulware, 2003).
- Despite being one of the fastest-growing immigrant populations in the U.S., African immigrants' healthcare concerns are understudied and underrepresented in the immigrant health literature (Anderson, 2017; Omenka et al., 2020). Most importantly, no known research specifically focused on understanding the lack of trust and the complex factors behind it among African immigrants.
- This exploratory study aims to understand the lack of trust in healthcare services among African immigrants, lay the foundation for further research on the matter, and eventually contribute to minimizing disparities in healthcare access.

METHODS

- An exploratory cross-sectional qualitative design with a grounded theory approach
- A purposive sampling technique was applied to select 19 participants living in Florida
- A semi-structured interview guide was developed, tested, and used to collect data through in-depth interviews that lasted for an average of 45 minutes.
- The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.
- An inductive thematic analysis was performed using Nvivo14 qualitative software.

FINDINGS

THEME #1: CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO LACK OF TRUST

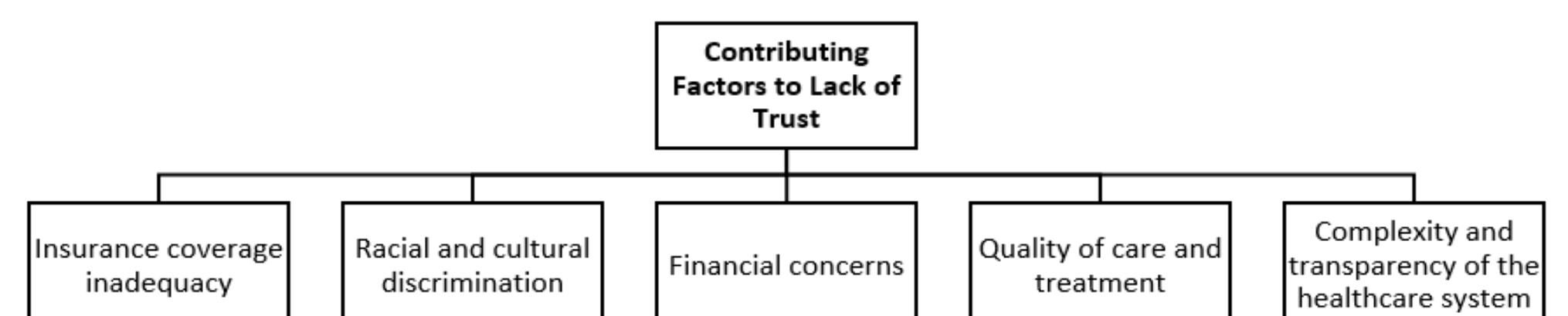
- Participants noted that incomplete insurance coverage often leads to unexpected out-of-pocket expenses, which undermines trust in the system
- Experiences of discrimination based on race or ethnicity significantly affect trust, with participants feeling that their treatment was inferior compared to others.
- The high cost of healthcare services and the lack of full insurance coverage lead to hesitancy in seeking care, especially among those who are already financially vulnerable.
- Perceived low-quality or inadequate care contributes to a lack of trust, particularly when participants compare their experiences to those in their home countries.
- The complexity and perceived lack of transparency within the healthcare system also erode trust. Participants expressed difficulty in navigating the system and understanding their entitlements and coverage.

Theme #2: IMPACTS OF LACK OF TRUST

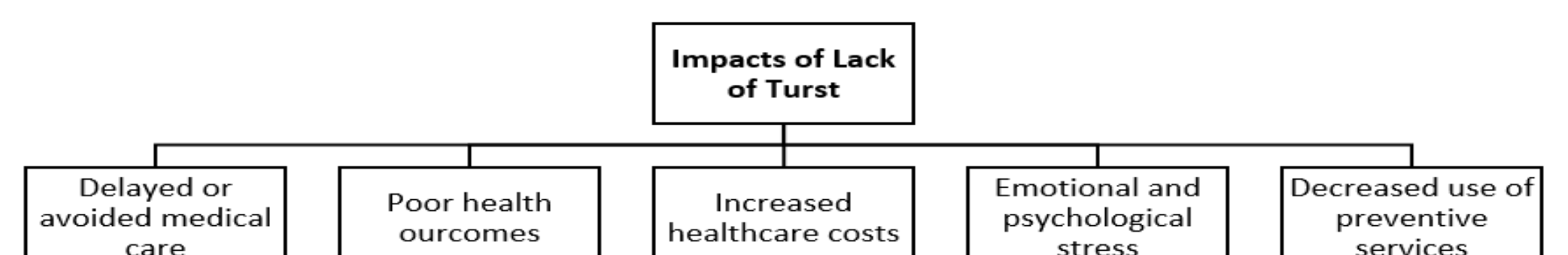
- Many participants indicated that their mistrust leads them to delay seeking medical help or avoid it altogether, especially in situations where they anticipate high costs or inadequate care.
- Avoiding or delaying healthcare can lead to worsened health outcomes. Conditions that could be managed or cured with timely medical intervention may become severe, leading to more complex and costly treatments down the line.
- The fear and anxiety associated with uncertain or potentially discriminatory treatment can lead to significant emotional and psychological stress.
- Mistrust can lead to decreased utilization of preventive services, such as vaccinations and routine check-ups, which are crucial for maintaining health and preventing more severe diseases.

THEME #3: IMPROVING HEALTHCARE TRUST

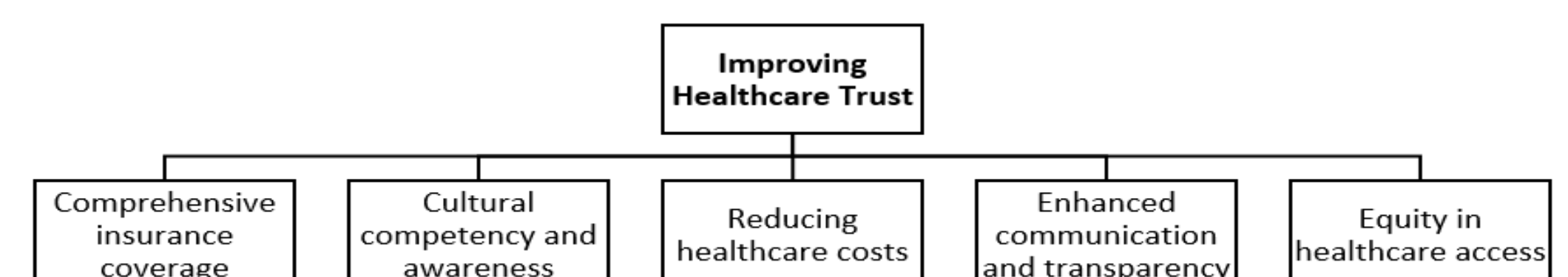
- Enhancing insurance coverage so that it is more comprehensive and transparent can help reduce unexpected out-of-pocket costs, which is a significant barrier to trust.
- Training healthcare providers in cultural competency to ensure they understand and respect the diverse backgrounds of their patients can improve relations and trust.
- Making healthcare more affordable through policy changes or subsidization, especially for low-income individuals and immigrants, could significantly increase trust and healthcare utilization.
- Improving communication between healthcare providers and patients regarding treatment options, costs, and care processes can help build trust.
- Ensuring that healthcare access is equitable and not influenced by racial or economic factors is crucial. This involves policy changes and possibly legislation to ensure fairness in healthcare delivery.



"The fact that you are Black—not only Black but an African—you are presumed not to be able to afford certain things."
 "I was standing there when people came to meet me but they had a room before me. Where were the rules?"



"Even if it is a critical moment, I don't have the eagerness to go to the hospital or go to seek for healthcare because you definitely know you can't afford it."



"They need to just learn the basics of life. [Laughs] Regardless of how wrong they are it's just so hard for them to apologize. Those basic needs of human beings 'Thank you. Sorry.' Those."

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

African immigrants often encounter a healthcare system that appears not only financially burdensome but also culturally insensitive. The lack of trust that stems from these experiences can lead to delayed care, avoidance of preventive services, and, ultimately, poorer health outcomes. To mitigate these impacts, healthcare policy must prioritize affordability and transparency, ensuring that African immigrants understand what services are covered and how they can access them without fear of incurring debilitating costs.

Furthermore, healthcare providers must be equipped with cultural competency training to better understand and respect the diverse backgrounds of African immigrants. This training should focus on communication styles, health practices, and cultural perceptions of healthcare that are prevalent within African communities.

In practice, the healthcare system should implement more community-based health initiatives that engage directly with African immigrant populations. These programs can help build trust through consistent, positive interactions with healthcare providers who are seen as allies in their health and well-being.

Finally, future research should continue to explore and address the specific barriers that African immigrants face in accessing healthcare. This includes studying the long-term effects of improved cultural competency and insurance reforms on the health outcomes of this community.