

**RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS IN LITTLE- HAITI
AND IN THE HAITIAN/HAITIAN-AMERICAN
COMMUNITY IN MIAMI DADE COUNTY**

Working Paper Series: SL WPS 02

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I. INTRODUCTION TO THE HAITIAN NEIGHBORHOOD CENTER, SANT LA'S MISSION AND OBJECTIVES

Our History: The Haitian Neighborhood Center, Sant La, was founded in December 2000 by a group of community leaders and service providers that were concerned by the chronic gaps in the provision of services to the Haitian/Haitian-American community of South Florida. Sant La's goal is to address the chronic service gaps resulting from the community's social isolation and lack of awareness about available community resources.

Our Funders: Sant La launched its operations in June 2001 with start up grants from the Kennedy Foundation, The Knight-Leigh Foundation, the Fisher Island Philanthropic Fund, the North Dade Medical Foundation, the Roblee Foundation and the Department of Children and Families. To date, other funders include: the Dade Community Foundation, the Peacock Foundation, First Data Western Union Foundation, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Florida, Miami-Dade County Department of Human Services, The Miami-Dade County Department of Community Economic Development, United Way of Miami-Dade, The Alliance for Human Services, Coral Gables Congregational Church, the Department of Children and Families, the Juvenile Assessment Center among others.

Our Board of Directors: Sant La is led by a 21- member broad-based community board with representatives from the Haitian community, the business community, and key public and private agencies. Sant La's Board of Directors is chaired by the Honorable Fred Seraphin, County Court Judge.

Our Mission: Sant La's mission is to empower, strengthen and stabilize South Florida's Haitian community by providing free access to information and existing services to ensure its transition from a struggling immigrant community to a successful and stable one.

Our Constituency: Sant La serves members of the Little Haiti community, the Haitian community of South Florida, the community at large, other non-profit organizations and governmental and educational institutions.

Our Objectives: Sant La's objectives are to provide information and referral services in the areas of social services, education, homeownership opportunities, economic self-sufficiency, access to healthcare and legal services.

Our Staff: Sant La boasts a professional staff of academic, linguistic and cultural competence. Our staff is knowledgeable about the Haitian community and has earned its trust and respect because of our history of involvement in numerous community initiatives.

II. GENESIS OF THE HAITIAN COMMUNITY OF MIAMI-DADE COUNTY

At the dawn of the formal Haitian emigration period, the first wave of immigrants who arrived in the United States between the 1950's and the early 60's were the professional and highly skilled Haitians exiled by the Duvalier regime. The second wave of emigration to South Florida occurred in the 1970's, and consisted mainly of persons essentially from the middle and lower middle class, who settled primarily in the Northeastern states. During the 1970's, the socio-economic conditions in Haiti further deteriorated with widespread corruption, an increasingly repressive state, inadequate basic social and economic infrastructure and a total neglect of the peasant population. Throughout the 1970's and 1980's these problems were compounded by the inherent social inequalities in Haiti. This gave rise to a mass exodus consisting primarily of poor peasants and urban dwellers who became known as the "Haitian Boat People." Haitians fled deteriorating conditions in Haiti and traveled by boat to the Bahamas and Florida in hope of a better life. While some reunited with family members living in other U.S. regions, the great majority remained in Florida. They settled, for the most part, in the South Florida communities of Pompano Beach, Fort Lauderdale, Overtown, and Edison/Little River.

Today, the "Boat People" phenomenon persists more than ever, because the socio-economic conditions that engendered it also persist. In fact, today, a greater number of Haitians of all social origins are compelled to leave Haiti to seek safe haven and a better life in the United States and elsewhere in the world.

Once inhabited mostly by middle-class whites, the City of Miami became the highest point of concentration of Haitian refugees in South Florida throughout the 1970's and the 1980's. By the late 1970's, there was a solid presence of Haitians in the Edison/Little River area. Because massive groups of Haitian refugees settled throughout this enclave, the neighborhood was christened "Little Haiti".

Simultaneous to the influx of Haitian refugees directly from the island nation and the Bahamas, there was a continuous wave of Haitian migration to Florida from the Northeastern United States and Canada. The latter group consisted of first generation immigrants who had worked arduously for many years, were fleeing the cold weather and were seeking an alternative environment similar to Haiti's tropical climate and lifestyle. These groups established themselves in such neighborhoods as Kendall, Miami Shores, North Miami, El Portal, and Miami Gardens. As the financial condition of Haitians who established themselves in Little Haiti improved, they also moved further north of Miami-Dade County and have also settled in large numbers in neighboring Broward County.

Today, the estimated 400,000 Haitians and Haitian-Americans who inhabit the cities of North Miami, Miami Shores, El Portal, Opa Locka, North Miami Beach, Homestead, Florida City and various sections of unincorporated Dade County include both Haitian "boat people" and Haitians who relocated from the Northeastern States.

Over the years, the Haitian-American community of Miami-Dade County has increasingly affirmed its position as a growing, thriving and permanent element of Miami-Dade County's cultural mosaic. This group of recent refugees, turned immigrants, turned American citizens, has fought many battles and has endured many controversies. Haitians have come a long way since the 1970's. This past decade, eight Haitian-Americans were elected or appointed to office in various South Florida jurisdictions, including the State Legislature.

Although firmly on the path to the socio-economic and political mainstream, there still exist a number of socio-economic problems affecting the quality of life for a great number of Haitians.

The pages that follow are intended to provide some insight into the social, and economic context of Miami-Dade County's Haitian community.

III. PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY FOR IDENTIFYING COMMUNITY NEEDS

Sant La utilized several methods to produce this community assessment of risk and protective factors. One approach used was a community forum, the Little Haiti Community Collaborative's Strategic Action Forum, a one-day event that brought together community stakeholders, concerned about the social, cultural, economic and political well-being of the neighborhood. The objective of this forum was to create a blueprint for the creation of an implementable, action-driven community agenda. Participants worked with enthusiasm and diligence, using the consensus process to propose community action goals. Additional focus group sessions, surveys and meetings were also conducted with residents as well as neighborhood-based providers and CBO Roundtable members. Focus group participants were asked to identify *risk-factors* that are potentially detrimental to the growth of the community, as well as *protective factors*, that help to insulate its members and serve as its circles of support.

The following descriptions of risk and protective factors are based on information collected in our continued assessments of community needs. We hope that funders, policy and decision makers will use this analysis to develop and implement effective programs based-upon the factors brought forth in this report.

Risk and protective factors are elements of a community's environment that make it more likely (risk factors) or less likely (protective factors) to experience a given problem. All communities have risk and protective factors, which, if addressed and identified, can improve living conditions for residents. While some risk and protective factors are well-known and well-documented, others are more difficult to identify because they are emerging in communities with issues not yet studied by social scientists or by self-help agency leaders.

IV. COMMUNITY RISK FACTORS

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:

Little Haiti has a viable business district along North East Second Avenue. It bustles with Haitian owned and operated businesses. The adjacent Northeast corridor, including cities of North Miami and North Miami Beach also enjoy a significant concentration of Haitian owned businesses. These enterprises offer a variety of services to the Haitian community. These businesses include restaurants, beauty parlors, multi-service centers, music shops, bakeries, real estate firms, auto repair shops, tailors and barbershops.

Over a relatively short period of time Haitian businesses have revitalized areas which were considered in decline. Yet, in spite of their efforts to create vibrant commercial enclaves, Haitian businesses have had difficulties accessing the types of resources needed to grow and sustain their enterprises. Studies reveal that there is a great deal of anger, frustration and cynicism in Miami-Dade County's black community regarding County government's economic development delivery system. Although there have been many government initiatives over the years to stimulate the economy and help revitalize black areas, the perception is that there has been no consistent long-term commitment from the County to carry these initiatives through.

The following risk-factors identified by Little Haiti participants confirm the absence of a sustained and coordinated strategy to revitalize the neighborhoods economic growth.

Risk Factor Indicators:

- ✍ Lack of culturally sensitive technical assistance for small-businesses
- ✍ Rigid loan criteria from lending institutions
- ✍ Difficulty to attract new sources of private capital investments
- ✍ Limited opportunities to retain and expand local businesses
- ✍ Lack of redevelopment initiatives in commercial enclaves
- ✍ Underutilization of commercial and industrial space
- ✍ High percentage of absentee owners
- ✍ Inability to facilitate mergers or joint-ventures due to lack of trust
- ✍ Unappealing storefronts/ general blighted conditions
- ✍ Code violations on commercial properties
- ✍ Needed infrastructure improvements
- ✍ Individuals with no or little credit history
- ✍ Lack of culturally sensitive programs to promote entrepreneurship among residents

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT:

The unemployment rate among low-skilled and limited-English-proficient Haitians is very high. In Little Haiti, it is estimated that 40% of the workforce is unemployed and increasingly unemployable. The risk-factors identified are as follows:

Risk Factor Indicators:

- ✍ Lack of marketable work-skills
- ✍ High rate of illiteracy
- ✍ High percentage of undocumented individuals
- ✍ Suburbanization of the job market
- ✍ Lack of adequate transportation to job opportunities
- ✍ Decreasing supply of jobs for low-skilled, English-limited individuals
- ✍ Lack of quality subsidized child-care
- ✍ Existing workforce training programs not designed to meet the needs of a limited English-proficient workforce
- ✍ Access to workforce training programs linked to the Department of Children and Families' Aid to Families with Dependent Children is limited due to immigration constraints
- ✍ Computer-illiterate workforce
- ✍ High percentage of individuals unaware of available job-training and skill-building programs
- ✍ Individuals embarrassed or afraid to describe their needs to service providers
- ✍ Service providers lacking the cultural sensitivity to meet their clients' needs

HOUSING/COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT:

Little Haiti, along with other areas of the City of Miami, experiences a severe lack of affordable housing, and represents one of the most depressed areas of the City. While 43% of residents of the City of Miami live at or below the federal poverty line of \$17,603, making it the poorest large city in America, the average household income in Little Haiti is \$14,142, the second worst ranking of neighborhoods in the City. The Little River/Edison area also ranks second worst in the City in the number and percentage of overcrowded housing units (11%), as well as per capita income (\$5,693). Home ownership rates, long associated with community stability and potential for revitalization, remain at around 25%, compared to the national average of 64%. (*Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 2001, and City of Miami Consolidated Plan 1999-2004*)¹. The risk factor indicators are as follows:

Risk Factor Indicators:

Housing Value and Supply:

- ✍ Skyrocketing sales prices of existing homes
- ✍ Lack of funding for affordable home construction
- ✍ Poor conditions of existing housing stock

Financial Profile:

- ✍ High rate of unemployment
- ✍ High rate of residents living at or below the poverty line
- ✍ High rate of underemployment (working poor)
- ✍ Poor credit history
- ✍ Limited information and familiarity about US financial system
- ✍ High rate of remittances to Haiti

Rental:

- ✍ Affordability
- ✍ Overcrowding- Multiple families living in single-family units
- ✍ Boarding house (room rental)
- ✍ Lack of information about landlord-tenant laws
- ✍ Illegal evictions
- ✍ Lack of formal leases or contracts between landlords and tenants

Neighborhood Stability:

- ✍ Unsafe neighborhoods
- ✍ Illegal Dumping that sometimes lead to contaminated sites
- ✍ Low-Performing Schools
- ✍ Transit Dependence
- ✍ Poor access to employment opportunities
- ✍ Old houses with lead abatement issues

Special Need Housing:

- ✍ Unavailable funds for emergency housing assistance
- ✍ Insufficient shelters for homeless
- ✍ Scarcity of Housing units for the disabled (2-3 years waiting list)
- ✍ Inability to access subsidized housing due to immigration status
- ✍ Lack of Elderly Housing facilities

EDUCATION:

Over the past decade, the Haitian community of Miami-Dade County has emerged as an important immigrant group that enjoys a number of significant milestones and achievements. However, these impressive gains are tempered by the increasingly alarming rate of academic failure and juvenile delinquency.

The risk factors indicators identified are as follows:

Risk Factor Indicators:

Academic Failure:

- ✍ High School students graduate with certificates, not standard diplomas
- ✍ Grade repetition caused by failure to pass the mandated Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT)
- ✍ Students Reading below grade level
- ✍ Overcrowded classrooms
- ✍ Newly arrived immigrant students with minimal exposure to educational institutions in Haiti (especially students of H.S. age)
- ✍ High drop-out rate

Health Access:

- ✍ Lack of health insurance
- ✍ Poor access to health care due to multiple barriers
- ✍ Lack of access to dental and vision care
- ✍ Alcohol and other drug usage
- ✍ Teen pregnancy
- ✍ High rate of STD infections
- ✍ Absence/limited preventive care practices

At-Risk Behaviors:

- ✍ High rate of absenteeism or truancy
- ✍ High rate of disciplinary problems and high school dropouts
- ✍ School and community violence
- ✍ Early and persistent anti-social behavior
- ✍ Unavailability of sustained funding for comprehensive community after-school programs
- ✍ Gang membership
- ✍ High rate of youth involved in the juvenile justice system
- ✍ Poor grades
- ✍ Discipline problems

Parental Involvement:

- ✍ Lack of access to parents
- ✍ Lack of community-based educational programs informing parents about school programs, activities and expectations
- ✍ Lack of parent advocate, helping parents understand the juvenile justice system
- ✍ Low level of parental involvement due to work hours and multiple jobs
- ✍ Low level of parental involvement due to language and other communication barriers
- ✍ Low level of parental involvement due to cultural attitudes vis-à-vis the school and parental responsibility

HEALTH CARE:

Access to healthcare in the Haitian community is hindered by lack of health insurance, underenrollment in existing subsidized programs, lack of information about the need for preventive health care and a number of primary and secondary barriers.

- ? Primary barriers are defined as all structural hindrances such as: Health literacy, Health coverage (insurance), co-payments, transportation, hours of operation etc.
- ? Secondary barriers are all culturally-related issues, such as: Language, responsiveness and providers' demonstration of cultural sensitivity.

The Florida Health Insurance Study indicated that Little Haiti has between 25% and 43% non-elderly uninsured residents. The University of Miami School of Medicine (UMSM) reports that 50% of Haitians under the age of 65 are uninsured, the highest rate of any other ethnic group². The risk factor indicators have been identified as follows:

Risk Factor Indicators:

- ✍ Lack of access to health care due to immigration status
- ✍ Beliefs in and use of alternative medicine while not admitting this to healthcare providers
- ✍ High percentage of HIV/AIDS cases
- ✍ High rate of unwanted pregnancies
- ✍ Lack of awareness of available resources
- ✍ High rate of unemployment
- ✍ Unaffordable health insurance
- ✍ Insufficient funding for subsidized health care
- ✍ Individual not seeking services due to fear of deportation
- ✍ Lack of proficiency in English
- ✍ Improper or poor diet
- ✍ Limited or poor exercise
- ✍ Exposure to lead poisoning

CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT

Haitian parents fit the general profile of the low-income, low-skilled immigrants who came to South Florida in massive numbers during the 1980's. In addition to their cultural baggage, which may be in conflict with local attitudes, these parents' lack of literacy and English language skills render them vulnerable to raising children who may potentially become ungovernable. These parents are stuck in low-paying jobs and sometimes work two or three jobs to make ends-meet. The necessity to work does not give them the opportunity to spend time with their children. The lack of quality time with their children exacerbates pre-existing attitudes and cultural constructs about parenting roles as well as the responsibility of schools and teachers vis-à-vis their children. Parents expect the schools and more specifically the teacher to both educate and discipline their children. They are in general, minimally involved with the schools; that is with their children's teachers and counselors. Active engagement with the schools usually means time taken away from work. Many parents fear that frequent calls from their children's school may result in loss of employment.

Risk Factor Indicators:

- ✍ Unavailability of support systems and programs
- ✍ Generational gap
- ✍ Parent fear of arrest for disciplining child
- ✍ Parent not knowing their "Rights"
- ✍ Lack of knowledge of police procedures
- ✍ Lack of knowledge the Department of Children and Families regulations
- ✍ Little or no civic involvement
- ✍ Lack of awareness of available resources
- ✍ Adult illiteracy
- ✍ High rate of child maltreatment cases
- ✍ High rates of placement in foster care
- ✍ Lack of parenting programs
- ✍ Lack of family counseling programs

CHILDREN AND ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES:

The issue of disability in the Haitian community is one which is rarely discussed. The needs of disabled children their families and caregivers are generally considered taboo. The risk-factor indicators identified are as follows:

Risk Factor Indicators:

- ✍ Lack of comprehensive outreach and education efforts

- ✍ Lack of awareness about available resources within the Dade County Public Schools or other systems of care
- ✍ Religious beliefs that disabilities are caused by supernatural causes.
- ✍ Language and cultural barriers
- ✍ Lack of programs addressing these issues in the Haitian community.
- ✍ Lack of comprehensive outreach

SPECIAL NEEDS POPULATION:

This population includes the mentally ill, substance abusers, the homeless and victims of domestic violence, rape or sexual assault. With the exception of domestic violence, information within the Haitian community about special needs population is scarce and unavailable.

Risk Factor Indicators:

- ✍ Lack of awareness about the problems of special needs populations in the Haitian community
- ✍ Lack of comprehensive outreach and education efforts
- ✍ Language and cultural barriers
- ✍ Unavailability of supports and programs
- ✍ Ineffective service delivery systems

VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, RAPE OR SEXUAL ASSAULTS:

When asked about the most prevalent type of crime occurring in the Haitian communities of Miami-Dade County, most law enforcement officials overwhelming point to domestic violence.

Risk factor Indicators:

- ✍ Financial instability and dependency
- ✍ Lack of proficiency in English
- ✍ Fear of deportation
- ✍ Undocumented status
- ✍ Fear of retaliation
- ✍ Fear of homelessness

ELDERS/SENIORS:

The aging trend in Miami's Haitian community reflects Countywide demographic changes. The elderly represent a growing and most vulnerable sector of the population. The risk and protective factors are as follows:

Risk Factor Indicators:

- ✍ Lack of awareness of available services
- ✍ Insufficient housing for seniors
- ✍ Little or no available rental assistance for seniors
- ✍ Lack of available health care benefits for undocumented seniors
- ✍ Lack of social security benefits for seniors who are legal residents and have not met the requisite "forty quarters of work" in the United States
- ✍ Language and cultural barriers
- ✍ Limited funding to support elderly programs for Haitian seniors
- ✍ Lack of services and programs/activities for seniors

IMMIGRANTS AND NEW ENTRANTS:

Immigrants and new entrants fall into several categories. Some are documented new entrants (legal), some have requested asylum and have been granted permission to work in the United States, pending the disposition of their application (work permits) and many others are undocumented without the permission to work in the United States.

Risk Factor Indicators:

Documented New Entrants:

- ✍ Limited access to accurate and culturally sensitive information
- ✍ Immigrants are unaware of the availability of services suited to meet their needs.
- ✍ Lack of access to subsidized health coverage (5 year wait period) for adults and children unless asylees or designated Cuban/Haitian Entrants
- ✍ Information about housing and social services provided by a network of friends and family and may not be completely accurate
- ✍ Vulnerable (domestic violence, victims of crime and other types of legal and financial abuses such as financial scams and predatory lending practices)

Undocumented Immigrants:

- ✍ Limited number of programs able to assist the undocumented individual's emergency needs with food and shelter
- ✍ Lack of educational opportunities (college, vocational schools)
- ✍ Lack of employment opportunities
- ✍ Lack of affordable health coverage
- ✍ Vulnerable (domestic violence, victims of crime and other types of legal and financial abuses such as financial scams and predatory lending practices)

ENVIRONMENTAL BARRIERS:

Environmental barriers are things that affect at least a specific group of people in each community; they are not specific to each person. They refer to social and environmental factors which impact on a community. Social barriers impact the conditions in which each individual lives - their household, their neighborhood or town, and the larger community. These may include aspects of the *social environment*, including the norms and behaviors of their families, friends, and others in their community. It also involves aspects of the *physical environment*, including access to resources, exposure to hazards, and overall living conditions. Environmental barriers include the following:

Information:

- ✍ Lack of access to information about community resources

- ✍ Lack of access to the Internet
- ✍ Lack of access to culturally sensitive programs and services
- ✍ Lack of access to interpreters

Physical access:

- ✍ Lack of access to jobs and services (transportation).
- ✍ Lack of centrality of resources

Civic Engagement:

- ✍ Competing requirements for participation, including those things that make involvement difficult, such as having to work or care for children.
- ✍ Social approval and disapproval, such as whether family and peers encourage or discourage particular behaviors.

V. PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Protective factors are critical in figuring out how to address and remedy a community's issues. While the enumeration of risk-factors contributes to an understanding of behaviors and conditions that contribute to a community's problems, the protective factors represent a community's assets or circles of support in combating unwanted behaviors and achieving desired goals.

Knowledge:

- ✍ Education and Work Ethic: Haitians are arduous workers, enjoy a reputation as being unafraid to do menial jobs, work long hours, commute long distances and hold multiple jobs.
- ✍ Entrepreneurial spirit: Haitians bring with them the will and desire to start their own businesses. They are known to work extremely hard towards these goals.
- ✍ New entrants skills: Many new-entrants and immigrants have earned from Haiti degrees in education, medicine, engineering, law and accounting.

Social Environment:

- ✍ Extended family support system: Availability and continuity of social support ties such as with families, friends and neighbors. Many Haitian/Haitian-American households are comprised of three generations (grandparents, parents and children) and other distant relatives. Information is also communicated through networks of trusted family members and friends.
- ✍ Spiritual: The Haitian people are very religious and churches of multiple denominations are gathering places for a great number of individual and families. Churches represent a unique opportunity to access the Haitian community.
- ✍ Haitian history is replete with examples of endurance, pride, perseverance, determination, strength and patience.
- ✍ Trusted sources of information: Haitians and Haitian -Americans get most of their information through Creole Language Radio and Television.
- ✍ Existing Organizations: Increasing provision of culturally and linguistically sensitive social services by neighborhood based social service agencies.

- ✍ Elected officials/ Advocates: Haitian-Americans are represented at the local and state levels of government. Local advocates have gained national recognition for championing the rights of Haitians to access available services.

VI. CONCLUSION

The risk and protective factors are broad issues that have been identified by residents and stakeholders alike which can have great impact on individuals and families in the Haitian and Haitian-American community. The discussion of such factors is an important one in a community committed to addressing issues of importance to its well-being. The process of focusing on risk and protective factors is one which helps members of the community shift their focus from a reactive problem-solving approach to one which is more proactive and preventive in nature: while many focus on risk-factors to help bring forth resources needed to resolve the problems at-hand, the identification of protective factors is an equally important process which recognizes strengths and assets indigenous to a community.

The next phase of this process is to further identify which risk and protective factors deserve additional focus of more interventions in our quest to address and meet the needs of the Haitian community in South Florida and support its successful integration into our society.

Again, we hope that this analysis will enable funders, policy and decision makers to develop and implement effectual and efficient programs that can be utilized to help improve living conditions in the Haitian/Haitian-American community of Miami-Dade County.

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