

**The Unseen Wounds:
Investigating the Influence of Unaddressed Trauma on the Adjustment and Resilience of
Haitian Immigrants in Maryland**

by

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Abstract

Migration, especially in childhood, can introduce profound psychological challenges, weaving a complex narrative of resilience, struggle, and the pursuit of identity. In Maryland, where over 20,000 Haitian immigrants reside, existing research falls short in addressing the specific mental health challenges they face, particularly those stemming from political unrest and natural disasters. Haitians are at an elevated risk of psychological distress, often exacerbated by acculturation stress and past trauma. The researcher explores the roles that early-life experiences in Haiti and acculturation in the United States have on the mental health, social integration, and adult success of Haitian immigrants.

Focusing on Haitian immigrants in Maryland aged 18 to 65 who migrated as children, this research examines how their formative years in Haiti and subsequent growth in the U.S. have influenced their well-being in adulthood. Utilizing qualitative methods, the researcher conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews to map the trajectory of their social and psychological adjustment. Interviews were transcribed and reviewed to ensure accuracy, with initial thoughts noted. During analysis, key codes such as "felt isolated," "struggled with identity," and "missed Haiti" were identified through repeated reading and data immersion. These codes were organized into coherent themes to reflect the participants' experiences accurately.

Findings indicate that Haitian migrants in Maryland often experience detachment from relatives and a lack of community relationships in the U.S. Amidst poverty, language barriers, and family expectations, many participants demonstrated resilience by relying on religion. Despite difficulties in Haiti, participants conveyed that their lives there were more enjoyable and comfortable compared to the U.S., with many transitioning from affluence to long-term poverty.

The study reveals the paradox of migration: leaving perceived well-being for promise, only to confront new hardships. The findings highlight the importance of social support networks in reducing Haitian immigrants' mental health issues and the necessity for culturally specific interventions to address their significant sense of isolation and longing. Further research should explore why Haitian immigrants in the U.S. hold such strong nostalgia for Haiti and favor life there, investigating their social connections, cultural identity, and sense of belonging to develop interventions aiding cultural integration while preserving their heritage.

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Preface

Embarking on this journey over the past four years has been both challenging and rewarding. It has been marked by moments of struggle and triumph, and I am deeply grateful to the many individuals who have supported and encouraged me along the way. This preface is a testament to their unwavering support and the profound impact they have had on my life and work.

When I first entered the program at the Pitt School of Public Health, it was during a particularly difficult time in the world. Navigating this unfamiliar space was daunting, but I was fortunate to have the guidance of Dr. Valire Copeland, my social work advisor. Her support and encouragement were pivotal in helping me find my voice and confidence. Dr. Copeland, your belief in me has been the cornerstone of my success, and for that, I am deeply thankful.

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serve as a mentor. Your encouragement, especially when I doubted my abilities, and your support throughout my illness were invaluable. Bridging the Gaps (BTG) opened doors to lifelong friendships and mentorships, for which I am profoundly grateful.

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The countless invaluable experiences I received during my time at the Pitt School of Public Health have been transformative. These opportunities have not only enhanced my academic and professional journey but also enriched my personal growth.

To my friends and family at Allegheny Center Alliance Church, your belief in me, your prayers, and your support during some of the most difficult times of my life and in the writing of this document have been a source of strength and hope. I am deeply grateful for your presence and encouragement.

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I dedicate this project to my mother, Marie Vivianne Boyer Abraham, my biggest cheerleader, support system, and best friend. I love you dearly, and I do not know where I would be without you.

As I present this essay, it stands as a testament not just to my academic achievements but to the love, support, and belief that so many wonderful people have shown me. Thank you all from the bottom of my heart.

1.0 Introduction

Migration, while it is often a journey of resilience and hope, can also carry an undercurrent of profound psychological impact (Bhugra & Becker, 2005). For Haitian immigrants who moved to Maryland as children, this experience is often fraught with many challenges that significantly impact their mental health and overall well-being. The transition from a homeland marked by political instability, natural disasters, and economic hardships to a new environment presents a complex set of hurdles. These challenges often result in unaddressed trauma, leading to significant psychological, emotional, and social issues.

Every year, thousands of immigrants come to the United States seeking opportunities and a better life. The experiences immigrants face before, during, and after migration can impact their ability to properly adapt to life in the United States and ultimately achieve their goal of a better life. This transition can significantly impact an individual's mental health and well-being. According to Kirmayer et al. (2011), immigrants and refugees are at an increased risk for mental health problems due to the cumulative effects of pre-migration, migration, and post-migration stressors. These include experiences of violence or persecution in their home country, the challenges of adapting to a new culture, language barriers, discrimination, and lack of social support (Cossu et al., 2017). Immigrants from countries with constant turmoil such as Haiti are particularly vulnerable to the negative mental health effects of migration.

All immigrant groups face significant struggles, often marked by perilous journeys, harsh living conditions, and uncertainty about their futures. These challenges can be particularly severe, sometimes involving life-threatening risks and deep psychological distress. While the challenges faced by Haitian immigrants are significant, they share many commonalities with other global

migration experiences. Many immigrant groups, such as children fleeing the Salvadoran civil war or Somali immigrants who grew up in refugee camps, endure tremendous hardships, including violence, economic deprivation, and social isolation (Kirmayer et al., 2011; Cossu et al., 2017). These shared experiences highlight the universal difficulties of migration, which include pre-migration trauma, dangerous migration journeys, and post-migration stressors. Recognizing these common hardships helps to create a more comprehensive understanding of the immigrant experience. It also highlights the importance of developing robust support systems to aid all immigrants in their transitions and ensure their well-being.

Despite these commonalities, Haitian immigrants face specific challenges shaped by their unique historical, socio-political, and linguistic contexts. The intersectionality of being an immigrant, Black, and often stigmatized due to misconceptions about diseases such as AIDS further compounds the discrimination they face. Unlike many Latin American immigrants who often find services available in Spanish, Haitian immigrants frequently lack access to resources in Haitian Creole. This language barrier can significantly hinder their ability to receive adequate support, exacerbating their adjustment and integration process (Zephir, 2014). Additionally, Haitian immigrants often rely heavily on religious faith as a coping mechanism, yet they may find a lack of familiar religious communities and support structures in the United States compared to other cultures who have established more robust community networks. The compounded pre-migration trauma from political instability, economic challenges, and natural disasters further distinguishes their experiences, making tailored interventions essential for their successful integration and well-being (Nicolas et al., 2018). Moreover, the cultural stigma surrounding mental health within the Haitian community often leads to untreated conditions and exacerbated mental

health issues, as there is a reluctance to seek help due to fear of being perceived as weak or unstable (Desrosiers & St. Fleurose, 2002).

Haiti, the first independent black republic and the second oldest in the Western Hemisphere, has a tumultuous history marked by political instability, natural disasters, and economic challenges. The country's history is marred by colonization, slavery, and subsequent political turmoil, leaving deep scars on its social fabric. According to the World Bank (2014), Haiti remains one of the poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere, with over 60% of the population living below the national poverty line. Natural disasters, such as the devastating earthquake in 2010, which claimed over 200,000 lives and displaced millions, and frequent hurricanes, have further compounded these issues, forcing many Haitians to seek refuge in other countries (Schuller & Morales, 2012). Political instability in Haiti has persisted since the fall of the Duvalier dictatorship, resulting in continuous cycles of unrest and violence, compounded by natural disasters such as the devastating earthquakes and subsequent hurricanes, which have left the country in a perpetual state of recovery (Schuller, 2016).

Many Haitians migrate to the United States to escape these adverse conditions, however the process of migration itself can be traumatic. Upon arrival in the United States, Haitian immigrants often face significant barriers, including language differences, cultural adjustments, and systemic racism. The cumulative effects of pre-migration stressors such as violence or persecution, migration challenges like dangerous journeys and separation from family, and post-migration stressors including cultural adaptation, language barriers, discrimination, and lack of social support can exacerbate existing trauma (Bhugra & Becker, 2005; Kirmayer et al., 2011; Cossu et al., 2017). Research by Jones et al. (2015) indicates that unaddressed trauma can lead to mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and PTSD among immigrant populations.

Immigrant children and adolescents and U.S.-born children of immigrants are particularly vulnerable to mental health challenges due to early adverse experiences.

Early Adverse Experiences (EAEs) refer to stressful or traumatic events occurring during childhood that can have lasting negative effects on an individual's psychological, emotional, and physical well-being. These experiences include physical or emotional abuse, neglect, household dysfunction, exposure to violence, loss of a parent, severe illness, or natural disasters (Felitti et al., 1998; Shonkoff et al., 2012). EAEs can disrupt normal development and are linked to long-term mental health issues, difficulties in social relationships, and challenges in educational and occupational success.

According to a report by the National Alliance of Mental Illness (2016), immigrant youth are at higher risk for developing mental health issues than their U.S.-born peers due to the stressors of migration and acculturation as well as the lack of access to mental health services. In fact, immigrant youth experience higher rates of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation than their U.S.-born counterparts (Garcia, Prado & Szapocznik, 2016).

The enduring effects of unaddressed trauma from childhood have been recognized as precipitators of adverse life outcomes across various populations (Kira et al., 2010). Research has shown that trauma experienced in childhood can have long-lasting effects on mental health and well-being. Childhood trauma can lead to negative outcomes such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in adulthood (Felitti et al., 1998).

Studies conducted both in Haiti and the United States provide crucial insights into the mental health challenges faced by Haitian immigrants. For instance, Desrosiers and St. Fleurose (2002) highlight the severe mental health impacts of systemic stressors such as economic hardship and natural disasters. This study aligns with research by Venters & Gany (2011), which indicates

that Haitian immigrants experience substantial challenges, such as cultural adjustment, language barriers, and social isolation, which contribute to mental health issues like depression and anxiety. Nicolas et al. (2018), provides crucial insights into the expression and treatment of depression among Haitian immigrants in the U.S. Their study reveals that Haitian immigrants face significant barriers to accessing mental health services, including financial limitations and cultural stigmas surrounding mental illness. These barriers often result in untreated conditions and exacerbated mental health issues within this community. Additionally, Nicolas et al., emphasizes high rates of PTSD and depression among Haitian immigrant students in the U.S., exacerbated by trauma and inadequate support systems. Despite these pressing issues, data often underreports the extent of these challenges, leading to insufficient policy responses and resources to adequately address the needs of this population (Migration Policy Institute, 2022).

The report "Haitian Immigration and Its Impact on the U.S." by the Migration Policy Institute (2022) highlights the socio-economic challenges faced by the Haitian community, including underemployment and limited access to healthcare. Furthermore, a study by Fawzi et al. (2009) in *BMC Public Health* highlights that Haitian immigrant students in the U.S. face considerable mental health challenges, with 14% showing symptoms of depression and 12% exhibiting symptoms of PTSD. This study underscores the lack of mental health resources tailored to the experiences of Haitian immigrants, particularly in Maryland, where community-specific data is scarce (Fawzi et al., 2009).

Maryland, with its significant immigrant community, presents a microcosm where these issues are conspicuous yet unexplored. The Haitian community in Maryland has experienced significant growth due to recent immigration policies and legislation that have facilitated increased migration (World Population Review, 2024). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2023),

Maryland's Haitian population has grown to approximately 17,000, representing about 0.28% of the state's total population. Baltimore alone is home to around 7,500 Haitians, with substantial populations also residing in Silver Spring and Hyattsville.

The Biden Administration's Humanitarian Parole Program, which includes the Haitian Family Reunification Parole (HFRP) Program and other provisions for Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans, and Venezuelans, has significantly impacted the Haitian community. Initiated in 2022, this program allows Haitians to enter the United States under humanitarian parole due to the ongoing crises in Haiti, such as political instability and natural disasters (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2023). Consequently, there has been a notable increase in the number of Haitian immigrants, colloquially referred to as "moun Biden" or "Biden people," by the Haitian community. This influx has led to an increased demand for household support and services, highlighting the critical need for tailored resources and policies to accommodate this rapidly growing population.

In this community, mental health concerns are often overshadowed by a cultural emphasis on resilience and strength, with many viewing mental illness as a weakness or a sign of personal failure (Desrosiers & St. Fleurose, 2002). This cultural stigma, combined with systemic barriers such as limited access to culturally competent care, language differences, and insufficient insurance coverage, means that many Haitian immigrants endure without the necessary support (Allen, Vaage, & Hauff, 2006; Fortuna et al., 2008).

In the only study to date focused on Haitian immigrants in Maryland, Sheffield (2017) explores the experiences of life and health among this population in rural areas. The study highlights significant health disparities, limited access to healthcare services, and the impact of cultural and economic barriers on overall well-being. Sheffield's research underscores the critical

need for targeted interventions and more comprehensive data to support the Haitian community in Maryland effectively.

Despite the growth among this population and the clear need for more support, there is a notable lack of research focused on the mental health needs of this community. Anecdotal evidence from community leaders, service providers and community members suggest high rates of mental health concerns within the Haitian community as well as a lack of knowledge on mental health needs and concerns. This population is also at higher risk of bullying, homelessness, and unemployment (Cénat et al., 2019). However, there is insufficient localized research to substantiate these claims comprehensively. The absence of comprehensive data and focused research on the Haitian population in these urban areas hinders the development of effective policies and programs designed to support the integration and well-being of this growing community (Migration Policy Institute, 2022; U.S. Census Bureau, 2021).

This study is a scholarly exploration of the Haitian immigrant experience, particularly focusing on the effects of unaddressed trauma on those who migrated as children and are now adults. Through this research, I seek to deepen the understanding of how these early experiences shape their current mental health landscape. The results illustrate the pressing need for mental health services that are accessible and attuned to the cultural and linguistic needs of the Haitian community.

By shedding light on these issues, I endeavor to provide a foundation for mental health professionals and policymakers to develop interventions that address the challenges faced by Haitian immigrants. It is not just an academic pursuit but a mission to recognize and respond to the silent struggles of this resilient community. Through a comprehensive review of literature and

empirical research, I will navigate the complex interplay of pre- and post-migration experiences, aiming to contribute to a more inclusive and effective mental health care system.

The following sections will present a detailed account of the unaddressed trauma among Haitian child immigrants in Maryland, describe the objectives and questions guiding this study, and emphasize its significance for mental health practitioners, policymakers, and the Haitian community at large. Furthermore, this essay will outline a structure designed to provide insight and guidance in the often-unchartered waters of immigrant mental health.

1.1 Research Objectives and Aims

The objective of this research is to dissect the intricate fabric of resilience among Haitian immigrants in Maryland, focusing on the exploring the impact of childhood trauma experienced prior to their migration. Recognizing the profound influence of early adverse experiences, I examine the developmental trajectories of these individuals into adulthood within a socio-cultural landscape marked by historical trauma and present-day challenges.

Research Question

1. How has unaddressed trauma from childhood impacted the ability of Haitian adults in Maryland to adjust to a new cultural context and develop resilience?

Specific Aims and Hypothesis

1. To investigate how unresolved trauma influences the adaptation to new cultural environments and development of resilience among Haitian immigrants.
 - **Hypothesis:** Haitian adults will report a range of trauma experiences that remain unresolved, significantly impeding their cultural adaptation and resilience.
2. To identify the lived experiences that have facilitated or impeded the development of resilience and functional adulthood.
 - **Hypothesis:** Social support and a strong ethnic identity will emerge as significant buffers against the negative effects of unaddressed trauma.

The research will yield a comprehensive understanding of the mental health experiences as well as needs of Haitian immigrants in Maryland, paving the way for the development of interventions that resonate culturally and contextually with this population.

The study's public health significance is rooted in the recognition that migration and acculturation experiences can profoundly impact individuals' mental health and well-being. Haitian immigrants in the United States face many challenges related to historical trauma, racism, discrimination, and socioeconomic disadvantage. By examining the impact of unaddressed trauma on the adjustment and resilience of Haitian young adults, I aim to inform interventions that can support the development of programs and interventions to address the mental health needs of children and adolescents to encourage the development of functional and healthy adults.

1.2 Positionality Statement

As a Haitian American woman and scholar, I find myself straddling two worlds: the rich culture of my Haitian heritage and the diverse tapestry of America. This unique intersectionality fuels my scholarly pursuit to understand the lived experiences of Haitian immigrants in Maryland, a community that holds a special place in my heart.

Growing up in Maryland, I was surrounded by the vibrant culture and rich heritage of the Haitian community. My parents, who migrated to the U.S. seeking better opportunities, instilled in me the values of perseverance and community. However, along with the stories of hope and aspiration, I also heard the hushed whispers of trauma and hardship. I have seen firsthand the toll that unaddressed trauma has taken on my family, friends, and neighbors—children who crossed borders with dreams in their eyes but scars in their hearts, adults who continue to struggle to balance the weight of past horrors with the demands of a new life.

Witnessing these struggles has profoundly shaped my identity and driven my commitment to conduct this research. The faces of my community members, who bravely confront the shadows of their past while striving to build a future in a foreign land, are the very essence of my motivation. This research is my way of giving voice to their unspoken pain and acknowledging their strength.

Being a member of the Haitian community provides me with unique insights and a deep sense of empathy. I understand the cultural nuances and the stigmas that often prevent my people from seeking mental health support. I am aware of the systemic barriers that compound their struggles and the resilience that keeps them moving forward despite these obstacles. This intimate knowledge shapes my approach to research, ensuring that it is not only rigorous and methodical but also compassionate and culturally sensitive.

As a researcher, I strive to bridge the gap between academic inquiry and community advocacy. My goal is to illuminate the specific needs and challenges of Haitian immigrants in Maryland, to provide a platform for their voices, and to advocate for policies and practices that support their mental health and overall well-being. I am committed to conducting this research with integrity, respect, and a deep sense of responsibility to my community.

This study is a testament to the resilience of Haitian immigrants and a call to action for mental health practitioners, policymakers, and community leaders. It is my hope that through this work, we can foster a deeper understanding of the impact of unaddressed trauma and pave the way for more effective, culturally competent mental health services. By doing so, we honor the strength of our ancestors, support the healing of our present community, and build a foundation of hope for future generations.

In every page of this essay, my passion for my community, my commitment to their well-being, and my belief in the power of resilience are woven together. This research is more than an academic exercise; it is a labor of love and a pledge to make a meaningful difference in the lives of Haitian immigrants who have endured so much and deserve so much more.

2.0 Literature Review

The journey from childhood to adulthood for Haitian immigrants who immigrated to Maryland presents a compelling case study of resilience in the face of unaddressed trauma. This literature review seeks to unravel the complexities of mental health challenges and adaptation strategies within this population. It navigates through the psychological impacts of migration, the multifaceted nature of trauma, and the cultural dynamics at play within the Haitian community.

Understanding these elements is vital for mental health professionals, policymakers, and community advocates aiming to support the Haitian diaspora. The literature review will dissect the theoretical and empirical underpinnings of trauma and its long-term repercussions, particularly how it shapes social and economic integration and the development of resilience among immigrants. The review will unfold a structured analysis: beginning with the psychological impacts of migration, it will trace the contours of trauma experienced at different migration stages and delve into the coping mechanisms immigrant's harness. It will then pivot to the context of Haitian immigrants, their historical migration drivers, demographic profiles in Maryland, and the specific mental health challenges they face.

2.1 Understanding Migration

In the grand tapestry of human history, migration stands out as one of the most consistent and transformative phenomena. According to Hoerder (2002), it has profoundly shaped societies, cultures, and economies over millennia. From the early movements of humans out of Africa to the age of exploration and colonization, and more recent waves of labor migration, migration has been a constant feature, continuously altering the demographic and cultural landscapes of regions worldwide.

The United Nations (2017) defines migration as the movement of people from one place to another intending to settle permanently or temporarily in a new location. This broad definition includes internal migration within a country and international migration across borders. Immigration, a specific type of migration, refers to the international movement of people to a destination country where they are not natives and do not possess citizenship, with the goal of settling as permanent residents or naturalized citizens. The distinction between migration and immigration lies in their scope: migration encompasses all forms of population movement, while immigration focuses on individuals moving to a new country.

According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2022), 281 million people are living in a country other than their birthplace. This represents over 3.6% of the world's population. Worldwide, the United States is home to more international migrants than any other country, and more than the next four countries- Germany, Saudi Arabia, Russia and the United Kingdom-combined. While the U.S. population represents about 5% of the total world population, close to 20% of all global migrants reside in the United States (Batalova, 2024).

People have always relocated in search of better job opportunities, a safer and more rewarding life for their children, or protection from conflict, persecution, or the effects of natural disasters. Unlike in the past, it is now more common and feasible to relocate for work or schooling, and technology has made it easier to retain strong ties with family and friends, send money home, or participate in the political, economic, and cultural life of one's country of origin. As a result, worldwide migration has increased significantly during the last few decades (International Organization for Migration, 2020).

According to the International Organization for Migration (2020), migration is driven by various factors including economic opportunities, political instability, and environmental changes. Economic migration is often from countries with fewer job opportunities to those with more vibrant economies. Migration contributes to economic development by addressing labor shortages, enhancing productivity, and fostering innovation. For instance, a report by the International Monetary Fund (IMF, 2016) highlights that immigrants bring diverse skills and perspectives, which can stimulate technological advancements and entrepreneurial activities. Additionally, the World Bank (2018) emphasizes that remittances sent by migrants to their home countries play a crucial role in poverty alleviation and economic stability, boosting local economies and supporting development initiatives.

Political instability is another significant driver of migration, as it creates unsafe and untenable living conditions, prompting individuals to seek refuge and stability elsewhere. Countries experiencing political turmoil often face economic collapse, widespread violence, and human rights violations, which disrupt daily life and threaten personal safety. This turmoil can lead to mass displacement, with people fleeing to neighboring countries or more distant nations in search of security and better opportunities. The resulting migration flows can strain the resources

of host countries, creating challenges in housing, healthcare, and employment. Additionally, political instability can lead to restrictive immigration policies as destination countries attempt to manage the influx of refugees and asylum seekers. A report by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2020) highlights that political instability in regions like the Middle East, Central America, and parts of Africa has led to significant increases in displaced populations, underscoring the urgent need for coordinated international responses to address the root causes and provide adequate support for affected individuals.

Increasingly, environmental changes and natural disasters are influencing migration decisions. This includes displacement due to drought, floods, earthquakes, and hurricanes. The International Organization for Migration (2020) highlights that environmental factors are becoming more significant in driving migration, as climate change and natural disasters disrupt livelihoods and force communities to relocate. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), by the end of 2022, there were 108.4 million people forcibly displaced worldwide due to conflict, violence, and human rights violations (UNHCR, 2023).

Consider the most recent migration flows from Afghanistan, Haiti, Myanmar, and Ethiopia, which displaced millions due to continuing conflicts (Afghanistan and Ethiopia) and significant political, economic, and social turmoil (Myanmar and Haiti). The COVID-19 pandemic initially had the opposite impact, discouraging many potential international migrants from moving to another country due to travel restrictions and economic uncertainties. However, as the pandemic's impact has waned, migration flows have resumed and, in some cases, increased as individuals seek to escape deteriorating conditions in their home countries and pursue better opportunities abroad.

Migration has historically contributed to the spread of ideas, cultures, and technologies, fostering cultural exchange and innovation. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) 2020 World Migration Report, migration has facilitated the exchange of knowledge and cultural practices, enriched societies and driving economic growth. This process has also led to significant demographic changes, with countries such as the United States and Canada being shaped by successive waves of immigrants (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, & Medicine, 2017).

One notable example is the Great Migration in the United States, which took place from 1916 to 1970. During this period, six million African Americans moved from the rural South to the urban North, Midwest, and West. This massive demographic shift had profound social and economic impacts, contributing to the Civil Rights Movement and reshaping urban demographics (Wilkerson, 2010). The influx of African Americans into northern cities brought about cultural innovations, such as the Harlem Renaissance, and significantly altered the political landscape, influencing policies and societal norms (Tolnay, 2003).

As we consider these historical movements, it is essential to understand the migration cycle and how it continues to influence contemporary migration patterns and policies.

2.1.1 The Migration Cycle: The Haitian Experience

Migration is a multifaceted phenomenon that has shaped societies, economies, and cultures throughout human history. The Migration Cycle is a theoretical framework that helps to understand the stages and experiences of migrants throughout their journey. This framework is informed by various migration theories and models that provide insights into the factors driving migration and the challenges faced by migrants at different stages. Understanding the Migration Cycle is crucial

for comprehending the immigrant experience and developing policies to support migrant populations.

Haitian immigrants face challenges and experiences that can be better understood through this framework. Given Haiti's tumultuous history of political instability, economic hardship, and natural disasters, Haitian immigrants often embark on migration journeys out of necessity rather than choice.

The migration cycle encapsulates this journey in a series of distinct phases: Pre-departure, Entry, Stay, and Return. Each phase represents a different set of challenges and experiences for migrants, shaping their lives and the communities they touch.

2.1.1.1 Pre-Departure

According to Castaneda et al. (2015), the migration cycle begins with the Pre-departure phase. This stage involves making critical decisions and organizing activities long before the actual move. Migrants must mentally prepare to engage with new cultures and languages and face potential isolation and discrimination in their destination countries. This phase includes evaluating push factors such as economic hardships, conflict, and natural disasters, alongside pull factors like better job opportunities and higher living standards.

The concept of push and pull factors is rooted in Everett S. Lee's "Theory of Migration" (1966). Lee posits that migration is driven by push factors, such as adverse conditions compelling individuals to leave their place of origin, and pull factors, which attract individuals to a new destination. For example, economic challenges in the home country might push individuals to migrate, while the promise of better employment opportunities in another country pulls them towards that destination.

Haitian immigrants often face significant hardships during the Pre-departure phase. Haiti's history of political instability, economic deprivation, and frequent natural disasters, such as the catastrophic 2010 earthquake, have been major push factors (Schuller, 2016). These conditions create chronic stress and trauma, influencing the decision to migrate. During this phase, Haitian migrants gather resources, secure necessary paperwork, and say their farewells, marked by a mix of anticipation, fear and anxiety.

In an article titled "A Year After Del Rio" Julia Neusner (2022), described several narratives of Haitians who fled horrifying conditions. These included "a man whose wife was brutally stabbed by gangs with political ties, a young Haitian couple who faced death threats by an opposition political leader for the man's support of his brother's political campaign, a man who escaped an assassination attempt at a political demonstration, and a man who fled Haiti after being shot at by an organized criminal group that was hired to kill him."

Emotional struggles during the Pre-departure phase are profound. Many Haitian migrants face the difficult decision of leaving behind family members, knowing that separation could last for years or even be permanent. This can be particularly challenging for those with young children or elderly parents who rely on their care. Furthermore, fear of retaliation or jealousy from neighbors and other family members often forces migrants to keep their plans secret, adding another layer of stress and isolation. According to Pradere (2020), the pressure to migrate covertly exacerbates feelings of anxiety and guilt, as migrants worry about the repercussions their departure might have on those left behind.

Moreover, many migrants embark on their journeys alone, increasing feelings of vulnerability and uncertainty. The prospect of facing an unknown future without the support of familiar faces can be daunting. This is especially true for Haitian migrants who often must navigate

complex and dangerous routes to reach their destinations. The uncertainty of whether migration will lead to better opportunities or further hardship looms large in their minds.

Another critical aspect of the Pre-departure phase is the psychological conflict experienced by those who are migrating despite relatively stable conditions at home. For some, the decision to leave is influenced by long-term aspirations for better opportunities rather than immediate danger or severe hardship. This can lead to internal conflict and a sense of guilt, as migrants question whether they are making the right choice, especially when their current life, though challenging, is relatively stable. Research by Degerville (2023) highlights that this cognitive dissonance can result in significant stress and anxiety, complicating the emotional landscape of pre-departure.

2.1.1.2 Entry

The Entry phase is a critical stage in the migration cycle, involving the initial arrival in a new country. This phase is marked by the physical and legal process of crossing borders, which can be fraught with significant challenges, uncertainties, and dangers. During this phase, migrants must navigate complex immigration laws, potentially hazardous travel routes, and the initial steps of adjusting to a new environment. The experiences and outcomes of this phase are profoundly influenced by legal categorizations, such as being classified as refugees, asylum seekers, or undocumented migrants, each of which comes with different rights and levels of support (International Organization for Migration, 2019).

For Haitian immigrants, the Entry phase frequently involves treacherous journeys through the Caribbean Sea or overland routes through Central America. Many face perilous conditions, including overcrowded and unseaworthy boats, treacherous terrain, and dangerous border crossings. These journeys expose them to physical dangers such as extreme weather conditions, dehydration, and violence from criminal gangs and corrupt officials. As highlighted by Degerville

(2023), the physical and emotional tolls during this phase are immense, compounded by the constant threat of violence and the trauma of leaving loved ones behind.

A particularly poignant example comes from Jean Pierre's account in his opinion piece, "My wife and I fled Haiti to escape gang violence. Others on our journey did not make it" (Pierre, 2021). Pierre recounts the harrowing journey he and his wife undertook to escape escalating gang violence in Haiti. Their journey involved navigating through the dangerous routes of Central America, enduring threats from criminal gangs, and facing extortion at various checkpoints. Tragically, many of their fellow travelers did not survive the journey, falling victim to the harsh conditions and violence that plague these routes.

The psychological impact of these perilous journeys is profound. Haitian migrants often arrive in their destination countries with significant trauma, exacerbated by the stress of navigating complex immigration systems and facing potential detention or deportation. Venters and Gany (2011) found that migrants who endure such arduous journeys are at a heightened risk for mental health issues, including PTSD, depression, and anxiety. The trauma of the journey, coupled with the uncertainty of their legal status, contributes to a high level of psychological distress among Haitian migrants.

In recent years, the situation at the U.S.-Mexico border has been particularly challenging for Haitian migrants. Thousands of Haitian migrants have arrived at the border seeking asylum, only to face prolonged detention, harsh living conditions, and uncertainty regarding their legal status. The sudden influx of migrants has overwhelmed border facilities, leading to reports of inadequate shelter, food, and medical care. The situation has been exacerbated by fluctuating immigration policies and enforcement measures, leaving many Haitian migrants in a state of limbo (Pradere, 2020).

Legal migration in the entry phase involves a complex array of policies and procedures designed to regulate who can enter a country and under what circumstances. In the United States, this process includes various visa categories such as work visas (e.g., H-1B, L-1), family reunification visas, and refugee or asylum status for those fleeing persecution. Applicants must often undergo rigorous background checks, medical examinations, and interviews to assess their eligibility. Policies like the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) govern these procedures, setting quotas and eligibility criteria (USCIS, n.d.). Moreover, recent policies such as the "Remain in Mexico" program and Title 42 have significantly impacted asylum seekers, often delaying or denying entry to those seeking refuge due to health-related and security concerns (Human Rights First, 2021; American Immigration Council, 2022).

The "Remain in Mexico" program, formally known as the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP), requires asylum seekers to stay in Mexico while their claims are processed in the U.S., exposing them to dangerous conditions (American Immigration Council, 2022). Title 42, a public health order invoked during the COVID-19 pandemic, allowed for the immediate expulsion of migrants at the border without the usual asylum processing, citing public health concerns (Human Rights First, 2021). This policy was a significant factor leading to the mass deportations in Del Rio, as it bypassed the standard legal procedures for handling asylum claims (Haitian Bridge Alliance, 2022).

2.1.1.3 Stay

After arrival, migrants enter the Stay phase, where they begin the complex process of settling in, finding employment, acquiring housing, and integrating into the new community. Integration is a multifaceted process that can take years or even generations. Alejandro Portes & Rubén G. Rumbaut (2014) emphasize that successful integration involves not only economic

adaptation, such as obtaining work and achieving financial stability, but also social integration, which includes learning new languages, understanding local customs, and forming new social networks.

The integration process is influenced by various factors, including the welcoming attitudes of the host community and supportive policies that encourage inclusion. Portes & Rumbaut (2014) argue that successful integration benefits both migrants and host societies by increasing cultural diversity, filling labor market gaps, and fostering mutual understanding. Statistics show that immigrants contribute significantly to the economy; for instance, in the United States, immigrants have been found to contribute around \$2 trillion annually to the GDP (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, & Medicine, 2017).

Haitian immigrants face many challenges during the Stay phase in various countries, including the United States, Brazil, Chile, and the Dominican Republic. These challenges range from language barriers and discrimination to economic hardship and social isolation.

In the United States, language barriers are a significant obstacle for many Haitian immigrants, as they primarily speak Haitian Creole and may not be proficient in English. This language gap can hinder their ability to find employment, access services, and integrate into the community. A study by the Migration Policy Institute (2015) found that limited English proficiency significantly impacts immigrants' economic outcomes and their ability to participate fully in society.

Haitian immigrants often face discrimination and systemic barriers that impede their integration. Many Haitians in the United States experience discrimination in the workplace, housing, and education. This discrimination can lead to social isolation and hinder their ability to form new social networks, which are crucial for successful integration (Zong & Batalova, 2019).

Economic challenges are also prevalent among Haitian immigrants. Many find themselves in low-wage jobs with little job security, often due to their immigration status and lack of recognition of their qualifications and experience from Haiti. According to the American Immigration Council (2021), immigrant workers, including Haitians, are overrepresented in low-wage industries such as agriculture, construction, and service sectors. These jobs often come with poor working conditions and limited opportunities for advancement.

In Brazil, the situation for Haitian immigrants is also challenging. After the 2010 earthquake, Brazil saw a significant influx of Haitian migrants. However, many Haitians in Brazil face discrimination and xenophobia. According to a study by the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2016), Haitian migrants often work in low-wage, informal sectors with limited labor rights and protections. They face language barriers, as Portuguese is the national language, and many Haitians arrive with limited proficiency.

The economic instability in Brazil has also affected the Haitian community. Many Haitians struggle to find stable employment and secure housing, leading to precarious living conditions. A report by the Brazilian Ministry of Justice & Public Security (2020) highlights that the economic downturn has disproportionately impacted migrant communities, including Haitians, exacerbating their vulnerability and marginalization.

In Chile, Haitian immigrants face similar challenges. The country has seen a significant increase in Haitian migration in recent years, but integration has been difficult. Language barriers are a major issue, as Spanish is the national language, and many Haitians arrive without proficiency. According to a study by the Jesuit Migrant Service (Servicio Jesuita a Migrantes, 2019), Haitian immigrants often face discrimination and xenophobia, which hinder their social and economic integration.

The Chilean labor market poses additional challenges, as many Haitians find employment in low-wage, informal jobs with limited rights and protections. Housing is another critical issue, with many Haitians living in overcrowded and substandard conditions. The Chilean government has made some efforts to address these issues, but significant barriers remain (Stefoni, 2011).

Haitians in the Dominican Republic face some of the most severe challenges. Historical tensions between the two nations have led to widespread discrimination and systemic exclusion of Haitians. According to Human Rights Watch (2015), Haitian immigrants and Dominicans of Haitian descent are often denied basic rights, including access to education, healthcare, and legal documentation.

The Dominican Republic has also conducted mass deportations of Haitians, often targeting individuals with longstanding ties to the country. These deportations have created a climate of fear and insecurity among the Haitian community. Many Haitians live in marginalized communities known as "bateyes," where they work in sugar cane fields under exploitative conditions with little access to social services (Wooding & Moseley-Williams, 2004).

Despite these challenges, Haitian immigrants in these countries show remarkable resilience and resourcefulness. Community organizations and faith-based groups play a crucial role in supporting Haitian immigrants during the Stay phase. These organizations provide essential services such as language classes, job training, and legal assistance. They also offer a sense of community and belonging, helping immigrants navigate the complexities of their new environment (Degerville, 2023).

2.1.1.4 Return

Some migrants choose to return to their country of origin during the final phase of the migration cycle, known as Return. This decision can be driven by various factors, including

changes in personal circumstances, poor integration experiences in the host country, or improved conditions back home. While some migrants decide to stay permanently in their new country, others might migrate again in search of better opportunities or to reunite with family members. Russell King (2016) emphasizes that the decision to return is highly personal and subjective, influenced by familial ties, economic conditions, and feelings of nostalgia. For some, return migration provides an opportunity to apply the knowledge and experiences gained abroad. However, this process can be challenging, especially if their home country has undergone significant changes or remains unstable.

For others, the return phrase is forced upon them due to various reasons including changes in immigration policy. In recent years, deportations and forced returns have been significant drivers of Haitian return migration. For example, following the termination of the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Haitians in the United States, thousands faced the threat of deportation. According to the Migration Policy Institute (2018), the decision to end TPS for Haiti, which was initially granted after the 2010 earthquake, affected over 50,000 Haitians, many of whom had established lives and families in the U.S. This policy shift forced many to return to a country still grappling with political and economic instability.

A particularly poignant example is the experience of Haitian migrants deported from the United States in 2021. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. government resumed deportation flights to Haiti, sending back hundreds of individuals, including families with young children. Many of these deportees had been living in the U.S. for years, contributing to the economy and community. Their sudden return to Haiti posed significant challenges, as they had to navigate the complexities of reintegration in a country with limited resources and ongoing political turmoil (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

One of the most notable incidents of mass deportation occurred in September 2021, when more than 15,000 Haitian migrants gathered under the Del Rio International Bridge seeking asylum in the United States. Images of U.S. Border Patrol agents on horseback using aggressive tactics to deter migrants drew widespread condemnation. Instead of receiving humanitarian assistance, many were subjected to harsh treatment by U.S. immigration officials, including physical violence, deprivation of basic necessities and racial discrimination as well as mass deportations back to Haiti, a country still reeling from recent crises.

Many sources have documented terrible treatment Haitian immigrants endured at the border in the hands of immigration officials. A report by the Haitian Bridge Alliance (2022), described the documented human rights abuses and civil rights violations against Haitian migrants in the Del Rio, Texas, encampment. One man described being treated "worse than animals" and enduring worse abuse than he had experienced in Brazil. Detained migrants reported deplorable conditions, including lack of running water and minimal food, with one man describing his ten-day ordeal in Arizona without basic necessities (Haitian Bridge Alliance, 2022). The deportation process itself was described by many as "humiliating and inhumane" (Neusner, 2022). Departed migrants were reported to have been put on planes shackled at their wrists and waist and being misled by Department of Homeland Security (DHS) officials about their destination, only to find themselves back in Haiti. One mother recounted not being able to comfort her crying child during the flight because her hands were bound (2022). One deportee stated, "Nobody explained anything. We didn't know what was happening until the plane was landing in Haiti" (Haitian Bridge Alliance, 2022).

U.S immigration officers also refused to tell those being expelled where they were being taken; some being told they were being taken elsewhere in the United States, only to end up in

Haiti. One young man recounted attempting to seek asylum but being ignored by U.S officers. “Nobody explained anything. We didn’t know what was happening until the plane was landing in Haiti” (Neusner, 2022).

It is also important to consider the return factors impacting Haitians in other countries such as Chile and the Dominican Republic. In Chile, the economic downturn exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, led to increased unemployment and precarious living conditions for many Haitians (Palma et al., 2022). Meanwhile, the situation in the Dominican Republic highlights the complexities of forced return migration. The Dominican government has ramped up efforts to deport undocumented Haitian migrants, often without due process, raising significant human rights concerns (Human Rights Watch, 2023). Many deportees arrive in Haiti with minimal resources, facing an uncertain future and the daunting task of rebuilding their lives. The pervasive climate of fear and insecurity generated by these deportations leaves many Haitians in a state of limbo, struggling to reintegrate into a society fraught with economic instability and limited opportunities (Amnesty International, 2022). This dual scenario underscores the multifaceted and often harsh realities of return migration for Haitians, influenced by both voluntary and forced circumstances in different host countries (Human Rights Watch, 2023).

For many Haitian migrants, the Return phase is not a final destination but part of a dynamic and ongoing migration process. The challenges they face highlight the need for comprehensive support systems that address both the immediate needs of returnees and the long-term development of their home communities. By providing such support, policymakers and international organizations can help ensure that return migration contributes positively to the migrants' well-being and the development of their home countries.

2.1.2 Theoretical Lenses: Unveiling Migration Dynamics Through the Haitian Experience

Understanding the migration cycle necessitates a deep dive into the theoretical frameworks that elucidate the complex phenomena of human movement, particularly through the lens of the Haitian experience. By examining migration theory, resilience theory, the Socioecological Model, and Acculturative Stress Theory, we can gain a clearer understanding of the factors driving Haitian migration and the capabilities that enable these migrants to overcome the challenges they face. These theories collectively offer insights into how environmental, social, and psychological factors influence the migration patterns of Haitians, and how individuals and communities adapt and thrive amidst these changes. Through these theoretical lenses, we can better comprehend the adversities Haitian immigrants encounter and develop strategies to support their successful integration and resilience in host countries.

2.1.2.1 Migration Theory: The Push-Pull Dynamics

Migration theory is essential for understanding the complexities of migration, providing insights into the factors that drive people to move and the challenges they face at different stages of their journey. One foundational theory is Everett S. Lee's "Theory of Migration" (1966), which posits that migration is influenced by a combination of push and pull factors. Push factors include adverse conditions such as unemployment, political instability, and environmental disasters that compel individuals to leave their place of origin. Pull factors are favorable conditions that attract individuals to a new location, such as better job opportunities, political stability, and improved living standards.

Lee's framework expanded on earlier works by Ravenstein, who introduced the "Laws of Migration" in the late 19th century. Lee's push-pull model helps explain why people decide to

leave their home countries and what attracts them to new destinations. For instance, economic challenges in the home country (a push factor) may compel individuals to seek better opportunities abroad, while the promise of higher wages and improved living conditions (pull factors) draws them to specific destinations (Lee, 1966).

Contemporary scholars like Stephen Castles & Mark J. Miller (2009) have further developed this theory by incorporating global economic disparities and the interconnectedness of international markets. In their book "The Age of Migration," they emphasize how globalization has facilitated the movement of people by creating economic opportunities in more developed regions while exacerbating conditions in less developed areas.

For Haitian migrants, push factors such as extreme poverty, violence, political turmoil, and natural disasters like the 2010 earthquake and subsequent hurricanes have driven many to seek refuge and better opportunities abroad. The political instability and economic challenges in Haiti (push factors) compel individuals to leave their home country, while the promise of higher wages and improved living conditions in countries like Chile and the Dominican Republic (pull factors) attract them to these destinations (Lee, 1966).

The Haitian migration surge to Chile after the 2010 earthquake exemplifies the push-pull dynamics. Despite the journey's risks, Haitians were drawn to Chile's relatively stable economy and demand for low-skilled labor. However, the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic diminished these pull factors, causing many Haitians to reconsider their migration decisions (Palma et al., 2022). Despite the hostile environment and frequent deportations, Haitians continue to migrate to the Dominican Republic due to the dire conditions in Haiti. The proximity of the two countries, sharing the same island of Hispaniola, facilitates this migration, underscoring the persistent influence of push factors (Human Rights Watch, 2023).

2.1.2.2 Resilience Theory: Unpacking Adaptability

Resilience is the remarkable ability to adapt and thrive despite facing significant hardships. According to Masten (2001), resilience involves successfully bouncing back from adversity, trauma, or stress. Resilience theory explores how individuals, communities, and systems recover and grow stronger after difficult experiences. This theory is particularly relevant when examining the Haitian immigrant experience, a journey marked by immense challenges and remarkable perseverance.

Haitian immigrants often endure significant socio-economic hardships, cultural dislocation, and psychological stressors both during their migration journey and upon resettlement. Resilience theory helps us understand how these individuals and communities cope with and overcome such adversities. Several key factors are essential for resilience: personal attributes like self-efficacy and optimism, robust social support systems, and environmental factors such as access to resources and opportunities (Ungar, 2008; Sim et al, 2015). Resilient traits among immigrants might include maintaining positive relationships, formulating and pursuing realistic plans, holding positive self-regard, and effectively managing emotional responses (Southwick et al., 2014). These attributes are pivotal as immigrants negotiate the hurdles of acculturation and potential discrimination while managing the lingering effects of any prior traumas. For Haitian immigrants, these resilience factors manifest, shaped by their rich cultural and historical backgrounds.

Haitian migrants often demonstrate remarkable resilience, navigating the hardships of migration and building new lives in their host countries. During the Entry phase, resilience is demonstrated by enduring perilous journeys and overcoming legal and social obstacles. For

instance, many Haitians face dangerous journeys through multiple countries to reach destinations like Chile or the Dominican Republic (International Organization for Migration, 2023). In the Stay phase, resilience is shown through adapting to new cultural and social environments, finding employment, and forming new social networks. Despite facing discrimination and economic hardships, many Haitian migrants exhibit resilient traits such as optimism, self-efficacy, and strong social support networks (Masten, 2014).

Personal resilience among Haitian immigrants is deeply rooted in a strong sense of identity and cultural pride. Haitian culture, characterized by community solidarity, spirituality, and a historical resilience against oppression, provides a solid foundation for facing new adversities in a foreign land (Williams et al., 2007). Spirituality and religious practices, particularly Christianity and Vodou, offer psychological comfort and a framework for interpreting and overcoming hardships (Nicolas et al., 2018). A study by Nicolas et al. (2018) focused on Haitian immigrant women in the United States and their expression and treatment of depression. This study set out to explore how cultural and social factors influence the mental health of these women. The researchers discovered that spirituality and religious practices played a crucial role in their resilience. These women often turned to their faith as a source of strength and solace, which helped them navigate the challenges they faced.

Social support is another critical factor. Haitian immigrants often rely on close-knit family structures and community networks for emotional and practical support. These networks act as buffers against the stressors associated with migration and integration into a new society. Community organizations and religious congregations play a central role in maintaining cultural traditions and providing mutual assistance (Finnegan, 2023). A study conducted by Williams et al. (2007) examined the mental health of Black Caribbean immigrants, including Haitians, in the

United States. The study aimed to understand how these immigrants maintain mental health despite facing numerous adversities. The researchers found that strong community bonds and social networks were critical in providing emotional and practical support, which significantly contributed to their resilience.

Environmental factors, such as access to education, employment, and healthcare, are also vital. Despite facing barriers due to discrimination and systemic inequities, Haitian immigrants show remarkable determination to overcome these obstacles. Advocacy and social justice efforts by Haitian community leaders and organizations are crucial in addressing these challenges and fostering resilience (Finnegan, 2023).

Resilience among immigrant youth and children is particularly noteworthy. These young individuals navigate the complex terrain of dual identities, integrating their heritage with the culture of their new country. Schools, community centers, and youth programs are pivotal in supporting their adaptation. Educational resilience, characterized by academic achievement despite adverse conditions, is often observed among Haitian immigrant youth, driven by high aspirations and strong family and community support (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). Fazel, Reed, Panter-Brick, & Stein (2012) found that child migrants, including those from Haiti, demonstrated remarkable resilience when supported by strong family bonds and community support networks, despite experiencing severe disruption and trauma. Statistically, the resilience of migrants can be measured in various aspects of integration such as employment rates, health outcomes, and social cohesion. For example, a report by the Migration Policy Institute (2017) noted that in the United States, migrants contribute significantly to the economy, representing 17% of the workforce, which demonstrates economic resilience and adaptation to the labor market.

Furthermore, Haitian migrants' resilience is often bolstered by the transnational ties they maintain with their home country. Remittances sent back to Haiti not only support families but also foster a sense of connection and purpose for migrants. For instance, many Haitians in Chile send remittances that help support their families, demonstrating economic resilience despite their challenging circumstances (Orozco & Yansura, 2013).

2.1.2.3 Socioecological Model

The Socioecological Model, developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979), provides a framework for understanding the multiple levels of influence on an individual's experience. This model emphasizes the interactions between individual, interpersonal, community, and societal factors. In the context of migration, it helps to explain how different environments and systems impact a migrant's ability to integrate and succeed in a new country.

At the individual level, personal attributes such as resilience, determination, and adaptability play a significant role in how Haitian migrants manage their migration experiences. Despite the physical and psychological challenges of migrating through the Darién Gap between Colombia and Panama, many Haitians undertake this dangerous journey driven by the hope of better opportunities further north. This segment of their journey underscores the resilience and determination at the individual level, highlighting the need for robust support systems to assist migrants through such perilous transitions (Yates, 2021; Balaguera et al., 2023).

Interpersonal factors, including family dynamics and peer relationships, significantly influence Haitian migrants' capacity to adapt and thrive. Strong family ties offer emotional support and practical assistance, which are indispensable during the challenging migration process. Peer relationships foster a sense of belonging and community, further aiding integration. Many Haitian migrants rely on religious communities for support, often establishing their first connections within

a church upon arriving in the U.S. These religious institutions provide a sense of self and community in their new home country.

Community-level factors are also pivotal. The presence of established Haitian communities in host countries provides vital support networks. These communities often offer essential services such as language classes, job placement assistance, and cultural orientation programs, which are crucial for helping newcomers navigate their new environment. For example, Haitian migrants in Santiago, Chile, benefit significantly from community centers that provide Spanish language classes and employment assistance, facilitating their integration (Silva, 2021). These community networks help migrants navigate the complexities of their new environments and provide a buffer against the negative impacts of discrimination and economic hardship.

At the societal level, factors including government policies and public attitudes towards migrants significantly impact the integration process. Inclusive policies that promote social cohesion and protect the rights of migrants are essential for fostering a supportive environment for Haitian immigrants. For instance, inclusive immigration policies in Chile initially facilitated the integration of Haitian migrants, although recent policy shifts have made the process more challenging (Palma et al., 2022). These policy changes illustrate the fluid nature of the societal level's influence and the need for continuous advocacy for inclusive practices.

The migration journey of Haitians through the Americas, as discussed by Caitlyn Yates (2021), highlights how these socioecological factors interact. After the devastating 2010 earthquake, many Haitians initially migrated to Brazil, attracted by promises of construction jobs and humanitarian visas. However, political instability and economic downturns led many to move on to Chile, which was seen as a more stable destination until immigration restrictions were imposed in 2018. This pattern of migration demonstrates the impact of macro-level societal factors,

such as national immigration policies and economic conditions, on individual and community-level resilience and adaptation strategies.

2.1.2.4 Acculturative Stress

Acculturative Stress Theory, developed by John W. Berry in the 1970s, explains the psychological impact of adapting to a new culture. This can include feelings of anxiety, depression, and identity confusion, which arise due to cultural differences, language barriers, discrimination, and the loss of social support from the home country (Berry, 2005).

Haitian migrants often experience significant acculturative stress as they adjust to new cultural environments. These stressors can lead to mental health issues such as depression and anxiety, particularly when migrants face xenophobia or lack social support from their home country. For example, according to Wooding & Moseley-Williams (2020), many Haitian migrants in the Dominican Republic face discrimination and hostility, exacerbating feelings of isolation and stress. A study by Alegría et al. (2019) highlighted the mental health challenges faced by Haitian migrants, revealing high levels of depression and anxiety attributed to acculturative stress. This study emphasized the critical need for culturally sensitive mental health services tailored to the experiences of Haitian migrants.

In Chile, Haitian migrants have encountered challenges related to language barriers and cultural differences, impacting their ability to integrate into society. Research by Doña-Reveco & Levinson (2020) found that language barriers significantly hindered Haitian migrants' access to employment and social services, increasing their stress levels. Programs that offer language training and cultural orientation can help alleviate some of the stress associated with acculturation (Chiswick & Miller, 2021). These programs are vital in providing migrants with the necessary tools to navigate their new environments effectively.

Moreover, policies that promote social inclusion and protect the rights of migrants are crucial in reducing the negative impacts of acculturative stress. For instance, providing access to mental health services and community support can significantly enhance the well-being of Haitian migrants. A study by Blukacz et al. (2020) demonstrated that migrant-friendly policies and accessible healthcare services play a significant role in improving mental health outcomes for Haitian migrants.

Haitians in the United States also face considerable acculturative stress. A study by Dany Amanda C. Fanfan (2018) examined the role of migration-related stress in depression among Haitian immigrants in Florida. The study found that Haitian immigrants frequently encounter cultural dislocation and discrimination, which can lead to severe mental health issues. These challenges are compounded by systemic racism and economic hardships, contributing to elevated levels of anxiety and depression among Haitian migrants. Fanfan emphasized the importance of community-based support and culturally relevant mental health services in mitigating these effects. Additionally, a study by Silva et al. (2022) found that Haitian immigrants often rely on robust community networks to navigate these challenges, highlighting the critical role of social support in fostering resilience and well-being.

Furthermore, organizations such as the Haitian American Community Coalition (HCC) in New York provide essential services, including mental health counseling, legal assistance, and educational programs. These services help Haitian immigrants navigate the challenges of integration and reduce the impact of acculturative stress by fostering a sense of community and belonging (Zephir, 2014).

2.2 The Psychological Impact of Migration

Migration can be a deeply disorienting experience, uprooting individuals from their familiar cultural and social contexts and plunging them into new environments where they must navigate unfamiliar languages, customs, and social norms. According to Bhugra (2004), immigrants often face a range of stressors including acculturation stress, social isolation, economic challenges, and the experience of discrimination. These challenges can lead to heightened levels of stress, anxiety, and depression among immigrant populations (Pumariega, Rothe, & Pumariega, 2005). Additionally, the lack of access to culturally sensitive mental health services and language barriers further contribute to the prevalence of mental health issues in immigrant communities, leaving many immigrants struggling in silence (Alegria et al, 2007).

To comprehensively understand the psychological impact of migration, it is crucial to examine specific aspects such as the experiences of immigrant youth, the manifestation of mental health disorders, and the barriers that hinder access to care.

2.2.1 Migration Trauma

Many immigrants and refugees carry the scars of pre-migration trauma, including experiences of violence, persecution, or exposure to war in their home countries (Lustig et al., 2004). For instance, refugees escaping conflict zones may have witnessed atrocities or suffered severe personal losses, such as the death of family members or the destruction of their homes. Studies indicate that such traumatic experiences have a long-lasting impact on mental health, predisposing individuals to higher risks of PTSD, depression, and anxiety (Fazel, Wheeler, & Danesh, 2005; Miller & Rasmussen, 2010). The psychological baggage of these experiences often

complicates the adjustment process in the new country, amplifying other post-migration stressors (Kirmayer et al., 2011).

The migration journey itself can be fraught with danger and uncertainty, adding another layer of trauma. According to Kirmayer et al. (2011), many migrants undertake perilous journeys, risking death or injury, which can leave indelible psychological scars. For example, those crossing bodies of water on overcrowded boats face life-threatening risks, and those walking across harsh landscapes endure physical and mental exhaustion (Fazel, Wheeler, & Danesh, 2005). The anxiety and stress accumulated during such journeys can exacerbate existing mental health conditions and initiate new ones, highlighting the need for immediate psychological support upon arrival in the host country (Miller & Rasmussen, 2010).

Upon arrival, immigrants face the daunting task of navigating a new cultural landscape. Acculturation, the process of cultural and psychological change following migration, involves a balancing act between maintaining one's original cultural identity and adapting to the host culture (Berry, 2005). Acculturation stress emerges from the pressure to adapt to the host culture while preserving one's cultural identity.

Berry's model (1997) outlines four acculturation strategies: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization, each having distinct implications for a migrant's mental health. Integration, considered the most beneficial strategy, involves maintaining one's cultural identity while actively engaging with the host culture. This approach is associated with better mental health outcomes as it allows for a supportive, bicultural framework that aids adjustment. Conversely, marginalization, which occurs when individuals neither maintain their cultural roots nor connect with the new culture, correlates with higher levels of psychological distress.

Berry's framework of acculturation strategies highlights the mental health implications of different adaptation approaches, with integration shown to offer the most favorable outcomes. However, not all immigrants achieve integration due to barriers such as discrimination, language differences, and limited social support, which can lead to feelings of marginalization and isolation (Berry, 1997).

While Berry's model provides a framework, each immigrant's experience is unique and influenced by variables such as age, educational background, and the reason for migration. Younger immigrants, for example, may adapt more quickly to new cultural norms through schools and peers, yet they might also struggle with balancing dual cultural identities (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Older immigrants might face steeper challenges due to less flexibility in adjusting to new languages or employment practices (Ngo, 2008). Therefore, tailored acculturation support that addresses specific demographic needs can significantly improve mental health outcomes (Ward, 2001).

2.2.2 Impact on Immigrant Youth

Migration is a transformative experience, particularly for youth who find themselves navigating the complexities of a new cultural landscape during critical developmental stages. The psychological impact on immigrant youth is profound, encompassing a range of emotional, social, and cognitive challenges that can significantly influence their mental health and well-being.

One of the primary issues faced by immigrant youth is acculturation stress, which arises from the pressure to adapt to a new culture while maintaining their original cultural identity. This dual expectation often leads to a state of cultural dissonance, where the youth struggle to balance the values and norms of their heritage with those of the host country (Berry, 1997). The process of

acculturation can be particularly taxing during adolescence, a period already characterized by identity exploration and self-concept development. Research indicates that immigrant youth experiencing high levels of acculturation stress are at an increased risk for mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem (Schwartz et al., 2010).

Berry (2006) describes acculturative stress as the psychological, emotional, and social stress experienced by individuals who are adapting to a new culture. This type of stress comes from the challenges associated with adjusting to a different cultural environment, which may include learning a new language, understanding and integrating new social norms and values, and dealing with potential discrimination or prejudice (Berry, 2006). Acculturative stress can manifest in various ways, such as anxiety, depression, feelings of isolation, and identity confusion. It is often exacerbated by the pressure to balance the retention of one's original cultural identity with the need to assimilate into the host culture (Williams & Berry, 1991).

2.2.2.1 Depression, Anxiety and PTSD

Depression is a significant issue for immigrant youth, who often find themselves isolated from their cultural roots and support networks after relocating (Potochnick & Perreira, 2010). According to the American Psychiatric Association (2013), depression is characterized by persistent sadness, a loss of interest in previously enjoyable activities, and withdrawal from social interactions.

Research indicates that immigrant youth are at significant risk for developing depression due to their migration experiences. For instance, a study by Roberts, Gilman, Breslau, Breslau, & Koenen (2011) found that approximately 25% of immigrant youth met the criteria for depression. This high prevalence rate is attributed to a combination of factors, including socioeconomic challenges, limited access to mental health services, and the pervasive stress associated with

maintaining a dual identity. Roberts et al. noted that the constant pressure to succeed academically and socially in a new environment, coupled with the fear of not living up to family expectations, significantly impacts the mental health of immigrant youth. Their research underscores the profound impact of migration on the mental well-being of immigrant youth and highlights the necessity for targeted mental health interventions to address these challenges.

A 2013 study by Sirin et al. on the role of acculturative stress in the mental health of immigrant adolescents found that the challenges of assimilating into a new society while preserving their cultural identity can lead to feelings of loneliness and hopelessness. This longitudinal investigation revealed that immigrant adolescents face significant psychological stress as they navigate the complex process of acculturation. The study highlighted that the pressure to adapt to new cultural norms while maintaining ties to their heritage can create a state of cultural dissonance, which exacerbates feelings of isolation and hopelessness. These emotional struggles are often compounded by experiences of discrimination and language barriers, which further impede their ability to integrate smoothly into their new environment (Sirin et al., 2013).

Anxiety disorders also feature prominently among immigrant youth, with Santiago et al. (2013) reporting that 45% of the studied population met the criteria for such disorders. Anxiety manifests as excessive worry and fear about everyday situations, often disproportionate to the actual event or activity (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). The uncertainty and instability inherent in the migration process—ranging from legal status issues to socio-economic challenges in the new country—can perpetuate a state of chronic anxiety. Furthermore, the fear of deportation or familial separation can exacerbate symptoms of anxiety, leading to severe and persistent anxiety disorders.

Immigrant youth are also at risk for developing Post Trauma Stress Disorder (PTSD) due to exposure to trauma during migration and resettlement. Fazel et al. (2012) conducted extensive research on the mental health of displaced and refugee children, revealing that these youths face elevated risks for PTSD because of their traumatic experiences before, during, and after migration. Further emphasizing the vulnerability of immigrant youth, Halafoff et al. (2019) explored the mental health impacts on children who have experienced war, natural disasters, or displacement. Their findings indicate that without appropriate support services, these young individuals are significantly more susceptible to developing severe mental health problems, including PTSD.

Al-Baldawil (2002) examined the mental health of refugees and found that forced displacement significantly impacts mental health, with refugees experiencing higher levels of mental health impairment compared to non-refugees. Additionally, Bonsteel (2012) conducted a study with Kurdish women who migrated due to forced displacement, finding a strong relationship between post-traumatic stress reactions and overall mental health status. This study specifically highlighted the intersection of gender and trauma, showing that women who had experienced forced migration exhibited high levels of PTSD and associated mental health issues. Bonsteel's work points to the need for gender-specific mental health interventions that address the experiences and challenges faced by displaced women.

2.2.2.2 Educational and Economic Impacts

Adapting to a new school environment poses a significant challenge for immigrant youth in the United States. Students who are not fluent in English, have experienced trauma, or faced difficulties in adjusting to a new country may struggle academically and behaviorally. Immigrant students often face multiple barriers in the educational system, including language differences,

discrimination, and limited access to academic support. These challenges are compounded by psychological difficulties, leading to poor school performance and higher dropout rates.

Halafoff et al. (2019) conducted a study examining the educational challenges faced by immigrant youth and found that these hurdles significantly contribute to mental health problems, especially when students do not receive the necessary support and resources. The study highlighted the compounded effect of these challenges, showing that academic difficulties often lead to heightened psychological stress. Similarly, Cuevas et al. (2016) focused on the mental health needs of immigrant youth and found that unaddressed mental health issues can result in poor academic performance, social isolation, and even suicidal behaviors. This research underscores the critical importance of addressing the psychological well-being of immigrant students to improve their educational outcomes.

Language barriers are a critical obstacle for many immigrant students. Effective integration into the educational system depends on the availability of robust English as a Second Language (ESL) programs and teachers' cultural competence. Suárez-Orozco et al. (2008) investigated how these factors influence the academic success of immigrant students and found that schools with strong ESL programs and culturally competent teachers significantly improve student outcomes. Their study emphasized the importance of engaging students from diverse backgrounds in meaningful ways to foster both academic and social success (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008).

Extracurricular activities, sports, and clubs can provide immigrant youth with opportunities to build relationships and enhance their language skills in less formal settings. Schools that create inclusive environments and celebrate cultural diversity can improve the educational experience and overall well-being of immigrant students. Walsh et al. (2016) explored the role of inclusive school environments and found that schools promoting cultural diversity and inclusivity

significantly enhance immigrant students' sense of belonging and mental health. Their research demonstrated that participation in extracurricular activities helps mitigate feelings of isolation and supports better academic performance (Walsh et al., 2016).

Economic instability and social isolation further exacerbate the mental health challenges faced by immigrants. The struggle to find employment, often compounded by language barriers and lack of recognition of foreign qualifications, can lead to financial stress and diminished self-esteem (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Social isolation, partly due to the loss of established networks and community ties from their countries of origin, enhances feelings of loneliness and alienation, contributing to increased anxiety and depression (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008).

The educational system's role in providing support and resources for immigrant students is crucial in mitigating these negative outcomes. Schools have the potential to be sanctuaries for immigrant students, offering stability and resources to help them adjust to their new lives. However, this potential is often unrealized due to a lack of resources and culturally competent practices (Gándara, 2010). Addressing the mental health needs of immigrant youth through comprehensive support systems is essential for their academic and personal success. Providing culturally sensitive mental health services, robust ESL programs, and inclusive environments can significantly enhance the educational experiences and well-being of immigrant students (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2008).

2.2.2.3 Social Integration and Acculturation

The ability of immigrant youth to integrate socially and culturally is heavily influenced by their mental health. Difficulties in forming and maintaining relationships can hinder their integration into the community, perpetuating feelings of alienation and isolation. Research by

Garcia Coll & Marks (2011) supports this, highlighting that the mental health of immigrant youth is a crucial factor in their ability to form connections and integrate into their new environment. Garcia Coll & Marks (2011) also highlight that immigrant youth often face a paradox: while they may adopt the cultural norms of their new environment, this can sometimes lead to conflicts with the cultural expectations of their families. This cultural dissonance can contribute to stress and mental health challenges, affecting their social interactions and overall sense of belonging. Balancing the differing expectations from their family and the wider society can create significant internal conflict and stress, which in turn can hinder their ability to integrate and feel a sense of belonging in either culture.

Immigrant youth navigate complex social identities, balancing the cultural expectations of their families with the norms of their new environment. This balancing act can impact their social interactions and sense of self. Identity formation is particularly challenging during adolescence, a critical period for psychological development (Erikson, 1968). Migration can trigger an identity crisis, especially among adolescents and young adults. This demographic is already undergoing critical psychosocial development, as highlighted by Erikson's theory of psychosocial development. Migration introduces an additional layer of complexity to this process, as migrants navigate the intricacies of cultural identity and belonging.

Phinney's research (1990) on ethnic identity among adolescents in multicultural societies indicates that a secure ethnic identity is linked to higher self-esteem and better mental health outcomes. However, migrants often find themselves reconciling multiple cultural identities, which can lead to confusion and stress, adversely impacting their mental health. This identity dissonance is a significant stressor and can impede successful integration into the host society (Phinney, 1990).

Furthermore, immigrant children often fulfill duties necessary for the family's survival, serving as cultural and language mediators for their parents. As a US-born child of immigrants, I experienced firsthand the pressures and responsibilities that come with this role. From a young age, I was expected to translate documents, interpret during medical appointments, and navigate various bureaucratic systems on behalf of my family. This experience is not unique; Todd & Martin (2020) discuss how immigrant children often take on significant responsibilities to support their families. These duties can include translating for parents, assisting with financial matters, and helping to integrate into the new community. This immense pressure can exacerbate stress and mental health issues, highlighting the need for targeted support systems.

Discrimination is a harsh reality for many immigrants, manifesting in schools, workplaces, and community spaces. Such experiences can lead to social exclusion and reinforce feelings of alienation and inferiority. Pettigrew (2000) discusses how discrimination impacts the mental health and social integration of immigrants, emphasizing the need for policy changes, education, and advocacy to foster an inclusive society that values diversity and promotes equality. Similarly, Portes and Rumbaut (2001) have noted that experiences of discrimination can lead to a sense of marginalization and hinder the social integration process for immigrant youth.

Despite these challenges, many immigrant youths exhibit remarkable resilience. This resilience is often supported by strong family ties, community support, religious or spiritual beliefs, and adaptive coping strategies. Researchers like Ungar (2008) have noted that resilience is not just an individual trait but often a manifestation of the community and societal support available to individuals. Community programs that enhance a sense of belonging, provide mentorship, and encourage cultural expression can significantly bolster this resilience, helping youth navigate the challenges of acculturation and integration more effectively.

Supportive counseling and peer groups can help these youths explore and reconcile their identities in healthy ways (Schwartz et al., 2013). Peer support groups provide a platform for shared experiences and mutual understanding, which can alleviate feelings of isolation and foster a sense of community. Counseling, particularly when culturally sensitive, can offer the necessary tools for coping with the challenges they face, promoting better mental health outcomes and smoother social integration. Additionally, Aroian & Norris (2000) emphasize the importance of culturally competent mental health services in addressing the specific needs of immigrant populations, suggesting that tailored interventions can significantly improve psychological well-being and social adjustment.

2.2.2.4 Barriers to Mental Health Care

Accessing mental health care is a multifaceted challenge for immigrant populations in the United States, involving systemic, cultural, and financial barriers. These obstacles collectively contribute to the persistence of mental health issues among immigrants, preventing many from receiving the necessary care. Understanding these barriers is crucial for developing effective interventions and policies that support the mental well-being of immigrant communities.

Systemic barriers to accessing mental health care play a critical role in the persistence of mental health issues among immigrants. Language barriers are one of the most significant obstacles, as limited English proficiency can hinder communication with healthcare providers, understanding of treatment options, and navigation of the healthcare system (Sentell, Shumway, & Snowden, 2007). This barrier is compounded by a shortage of bilingual mental health professionals, limiting the availability of care that immigrants can access comfortably and confidently. Additionally, cultural stigma surrounding mental health within many immigrant communities deters individuals from seeking necessary help. Mental health issues are often viewed

as personal weaknesses or family shames, leading to underreporting and reluctance to seek help (Pumariega, Rothe, & Pumariega, 2005).

Financial barriers, including lack of health insurance, significantly impact immigrants' access to mental health care. Alegría et al. (2002) found that immigrants are less likely to have health insurance compared to native-born populations, making it difficult to afford mental health services. Even when insurance is available, high out-of-pocket costs and limited coverage for mental health services can deter immigrants from seeking the care they need. Policies such as the Affordable Care Act (ACA) have aimed to expand insurance coverage, but gaps remain, particularly for undocumented immigrants who are often excluded from public insurance programs (Vega, Rodriguez, & Gruskin, 2009).

Medicaid, the U.S. program providing health coverage to low-income individuals, presents additional challenges for immigrants. Federal law generally requires a five-year waiting period for lawful permanent residents (green card holders) before they can qualify for Medicaid (Broder et al., 2015). Furthermore, undocumented immigrants are ineligible for Medicaid, though some states have enacted policies to provide limited benefits, such as emergency medical services, to this population. This restriction significantly reduces access to necessary health services, including mental health care, for many immigrants.

Unfamiliarity with the U.S. healthcare system is another critical barrier. Many immigrants come from countries with different healthcare structures and may not be accustomed to the complexities of the U.S. system, leading to confusion and underutilization of available services (Vega et al., 2009). Additionally, there is a significant shortage of mental health providers trained in culturally competent care. Culturally competent care involves understanding and respecting patients' cultural backgrounds, which is crucial for effective treatment (Betancourt et al., 2003).

Without culturally competent providers, immigrants may feel misunderstood or mistrustful of the care they receive, which can discourage them from seeking or continuing treatment.

Addressing these barriers requires targeted policy interventions and community efforts. Policies aimed at increasing the availability of bilingual and bicultural health professionals are essential. Training programs for mental health providers should emphasize cultural competence and include education on the challenges faced by immigrant populations. Community outreach programs that educate immigrants about mental health and available services can also play a crucial role. These programs can help reduce stigma by promoting understanding and acceptance of mental health issues and encouraging individuals to seek help without fear of judgment. Collaboration between community organizations and healthcare providers can enhance the effectiveness of these programs (Kirmayer et al., 2011).

Additionally, expanding access to affordable health insurance and reducing financial barriers to mental health care are critical steps. Policymakers should consider reforms that make mental health services more accessible and affordable for immigrants, such as subsidized insurance plans or sliding scale fees for low-income individuals (Alegría et al., 2002). By addressing these systemic barriers, we can improve access to mental health services for immigrants, thereby enhancing their overall well-being and integration into society.

2.2.3 Physical Health Implications

The impact of mental health disorders extends beyond psychological well-being, affecting physical health as well. Chronic stress, anxiety, and depression have been linked to various physical health issues, including hypertension, heart disease, and exacerbated symptoms of other chronic illnesses (Katon, 2011; Musselman et al., 1998). Chronic psychological stress can weaken

the immune system, making individuals more susceptible to infections and slower recovery times from illnesses (Cohen et al., 2012). This link between stress and immune function is particularly concerning for immigrants, who might also face barriers to accessing healthcare services, further compromising their physical health (Alegría et al., 2007).

The physical health of immigrants can deteriorate due to the prolonged stress and psychological strains of migration. Chronic conditions such as diabetes and hypertension are often exacerbated by limited access to healthcare services, poor nutrition, and the physical toll of low-wage labor that many immigrants engage in (Torres & Young, 2016). The lack of preventive care and continuity of care for chronic illnesses further complicates health outcomes for this population. For instance, a study by Cummings et al. (2013) highlights that untreated mental health conditions can lead to increased healthcare costs and decreased productivity due to physical health decline. Conditions such as hypertension and heart disease are prevalent among those experiencing chronic stress, which is common in immigrant populations dealing with ongoing uncertainty and adaptation challenges (Cummings et al., 2013).

Chronic psychological stress has been shown to significantly weaken the immune system, increasing susceptibility to infections and slowing recovery from illnesses. This is particularly problematic for immigrants who, in addition to stress, often face barriers to accessing healthcare services. These barriers can further compromise their physical health, leading to a cycle of deteriorating health (Alegría et al., 2007; Cohen et al., 2012).

Many immigrants, especially those undocumented, are employed in jobs that expose them to hazardous conditions without adequate safety measures. This exposure can lead to long-term health issues, such as respiratory problems, injuries, and other occupational hazards (Moyce & Schenker, 2018). Children in immigrant families might also live in substandard housing

conditions, which can affect their physical and mental health. Acevedo-Garcia et al. (2005) emphasize that poor living conditions significantly impact health, highlighting the need for comprehensive policies that address the environmental and occupational health risks faced by immigrants.

The connection between mental and physical health is well-documented, with chronic psychological stress contributing to a host of physical illnesses. Cummings et al. (2013) discuss how untreated mental health issues can lead to increased healthcare costs and decreased productivity, owing to associated physical health declines. Addressing mental health is therefore critical not only for psychological well-being but also for maintaining physical health.

2.3 Understanding Trauma

2.3.1 Conceptualizing Trauma

Trauma is a deeply distressing or disturbing experience that overwhelms an individual's ability to cope, causing feelings of helplessness, diminished sense of self, and the inability to feel the full range of emotions and experiences. The American Psychological Association (APA) describes trauma as an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape, or natural disaster (APA, 2021). Immediate reactions to trauma can include shock and denial, while longer-term reactions can manifest as unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, strained relationships, and physical symptoms such as headaches or nausea. The impact of trauma can be pervasive, affecting various aspects of an individual's life and well-being.

Trauma can be classified into different types based on the nature, duration, and circumstances of the traumatic event. Acute trauma results from a single incident, such as a car accident, physical assault, or sudden loss. This type of trauma typically leads to immediate, intense reactions, such as anxiety, confusion, and emotional numbness. Chronic trauma, on the other hand, stems from prolonged or repeated exposure to highly stressful events, such as ongoing domestic violence, long-term illness, or living in a war zone. Chronic trauma often results in severe emotional and psychological distress, manifesting as anxiety disorders, depression, or other long-term mental health issues. Complex trauma involves exposure to multiple traumatic events, often of an invasive, interpersonal nature, and is particularly severe when experienced during critical developmental periods like childhood. Complex trauma can significantly impact an individual's ability to form secure attachments, regulate emotions, and develop a coherent sense of self (Van der Kolk, 2014).

Understanding the nuances of trauma is critical for developing effective treatment and support mechanisms. Each type of trauma—acute, chronic, and complex—has different characteristics and requires tailored approaches for intervention. Acute trauma is typically addressed through immediate psychological first aid and short-term therapeutic interventions aimed at stabilizing the individual and preventing the development of chronic symptoms. Chronic trauma, given its prolonged nature, often requires long-term therapeutic engagement, including cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), exposure therapy, and interventions that address the cumulative stress effects on the body. Complex trauma, with its deep-rooted impact on personality and relational capacities, often necessitates a comprehensive, integrative treatment approach that includes trauma-focused therapy, attachment-based therapy, and somatic experiencing to address both psychological and physiological aspects of trauma (Herman, 1992).

2.3.2 Effects of Trauma on Mental and Physical Health

The effects of trauma on mental health are profound and varied. One of the most well-known conditions associated with trauma is post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). PTSD is a mental health condition that can develop after experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event. Symptoms of PTSD include intrusive memories, avoidance behaviors, negative changes in thinking and mood, and heightened reactions (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). According to the APA, approximately 3.5% of U.S. adults experience PTSD each year, highlighting its prevalence (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). PTSD can severely impact daily functioning and quality of life, making it difficult for individuals to engage in normal activities, maintain relationships, and perform at work or school.

PTSD is characterized by several clusters of symptoms: re-experiencing the traumatic event (e.g., flashbacks, nightmares), avoidance of reminders of the trauma, negative alterations in cognition and mood (e.g., persistent negative beliefs, feelings of detachment), and hyperarousal (e.g., hypervigilance, exaggerated startle response). The complexity of PTSD necessitates a multifaceted treatment approach, including psychotherapy (such as cognitive processing therapy and prolonged exposure therapy), pharmacotherapy (such as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors), and complementary therapies (such as mindfulness and yoga) (Foa et al., 2009).

Trauma can also lead to generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), characterized by excessive, uncontrollable worry about various aspects of life. Individuals with trauma-related anxiety may experience constant nervousness, restlessness, and physical symptoms such as increased heart rate and muscle tension (Craske et al., 2017). Trauma-induced anxiety can manifest as specific phobias, panic disorder, and social anxiety disorder, each requiring specialized therapeutic strategies. Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) is particularly effective in treating anxiety disorders by helping individuals identify and challenge maladaptive thought patterns and behaviors associated with their anxiety (Hofmann et al., 2012).

Additionally, depression is a common mental health issue following trauma. Trauma-related depression can manifest as persistent sadness, loss of interest in activities, changes in appetite and sleep patterns, and feelings of hopelessness. Managing trauma-related depression often requires comprehensive treatment, including therapy and medication (Nanni et al., 2012). Major depressive disorder (MDD) associated with trauma often co-occurs with other mental health conditions, complicating the treatment process. Effective management of MDD typically involves a combination of antidepressant medications, such as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors

(SSRIs), and psychotherapeutic interventions, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy and interpersonal therapy (Kendler et al., 2003).

The physical health effects of trauma are equally significant. Chronic pain is a common consequence, as the body's response to prolonged stress can lead to muscle tension and inflammation. Individuals with a history of trauma are more likely to report conditions such as fibromyalgia, back pain, and other chronic pain syndromes (Geuze et al., 2007). The relationship between trauma and chronic pain is complex, involving both physiological and psychological mechanisms. Trauma can lead to dysregulation of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis, contributing to heightened pain sensitivity and chronic pain conditions (Sachs-Ericsson et al., 2007).

Cardiovascular issues are also prevalent among trauma survivors. The stress response activated by trauma can negatively impact cardiovascular health, increasing the risk of heart disease, hypertension, and other cardiovascular problems (Schnurr & Green, 2004). Chronic stress from trauma leads to the prolonged release of stress hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline, which can cause endothelial dysfunction, arterial stiffness, and increased blood pressure (Edmondson et al., 2013). Additionally, trauma-related behaviors such as smoking, poor diet, and physical inactivity further exacerbate cardiovascular risks.

Moreover, trauma can influence the onset of metabolic disorders, including diabetes. Chronic stress from trauma can lead to changes in glucose metabolism and insulin resistance, raising the risk of developing type 2 diabetes (Surtees et al., 2003). The link between trauma and diabetes is mediated by both direct physiological effects of stress on glucose regulation and indirect effects through health behaviors such as poor diet and lack of exercise. Trauma-induced hyperglycemia can result from stress-induced hormonal changes that increase blood sugar levels,

while trauma-related depression and anxiety can lead to lifestyle factors that increase diabetes risk (Roberts et al., 2015).

High blood pressure is another common issue, as the physiological stress response to trauma can cause long-term changes in blood pressure regulation (Shalev et al., 1998). Trauma-induced hypertension can result from chronic activation of the sympathetic nervous system, leading to vasoconstriction and increased cardiac output. Additionally, trauma-related sleep disturbances, such as insomnia and sleep apnea, can contribute to the development and exacerbation of hypertension (Lewis et al., 2015).

2.3.3 Trauma and Its Impact on Social and Economic Well-Being

The social and economic impacts of trauma are substantial, affecting an individual's ability to integrate socially, perform academically, and succeed economically. Trauma often leads to social withdrawal and difficulties in forming and maintaining relationships. Survivors of trauma may struggle with feelings of shame, guilt, and low self-esteem, which can hinder social interactions and the development of supportive networks (Herman, 1992). This social isolation can perpetuate the cycle of trauma, as individuals lack the social support necessary for healing and recovery.

Trauma can disrupt an individual's ability to form and maintain healthy relationships, leading to social isolation and impaired social functioning. Individuals with trauma histories may experience difficulties in trusting others, fear of intimacy, and difficulties in regulating emotions within relationships (Cloitre et al., 2005). This can result in a range of interpersonal issues, including conflict, avoidance, and difficulty establishing and maintaining meaningful connections. Social support is a critical factor in recovery from trauma, as it provides emotional, informational,

and practical assistance. The absence of social support can exacerbate trauma symptoms and hinder recovery efforts.

In educational settings, children and adolescents who experience trauma often face significant challenges. Trauma can impair cognitive functions such as memory, attention, and executive functioning, leading to academic difficulties and lower educational attainment (Perfect et al., 2016). Trauma-affected students may exhibit behavioral problems, poor academic performance, and absenteeism. Schools play a crucial role in supporting trauma-affected students by providing trauma-informed education, mental health services, and supportive learning environments (Overstreet & Chafouleas, 2016). Trauma-informed education involves understanding the impact of trauma on learning and behavior and implementing strategies that promote safety, trust, and empowerment for students.

The economic impact of trauma can be profound, with individuals facing challenges in maintaining stable employment due to trauma-related symptoms. This can lead to financial instability and increased reliance on social services. Additionally, the long-term effects of trauma can result in higher healthcare costs due to the need for ongoing mental and physical health treatment (Kessler, 2000). Trauma-related economic challenges can include reduced work productivity, job loss, and difficulty finding and maintaining employment. Individuals with trauma histories may struggle with work-related stress, interpersonal conflicts, and challenges in meeting job performance expectations. Economic instability can further exacerbate trauma symptoms, creating a cycle of financial stress and psychological distress.

2.3.4 Childhood Trauma

Childhood trauma refers to adverse experiences during childhood that can have a profound impact on an individual's development and long-term well-being. These experiences include physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, neglect, witnessing domestic violence, or experiencing natural disasters or political violence (Felitti et al., 1998). Childhood trauma is particularly damaging because it occurs during critical periods of brain development and can disrupt normal developmental processes.

The concept of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) has been instrumental in understanding the long-term effects of childhood trauma. ACEs are potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood, such as experiencing violence, abuse, or neglect, witnessing violence in the home or community, and having a family member attempt or die by suicide (Anda et al., 2006). The ACE study, a landmark research project conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Kaiser Permanente, revealed that ACEs are common and have a significant impact on future health and well-being. The study found a strong correlation between the number of ACEs and the risk of various negative health outcomes, including chronic diseases, mental health disorders, and substance abuse (Felitti et al., 1998).

Toxic stress is another important concept in the context of childhood trauma. Toxic stress refers to the excessive or prolonged activation of the stress response systems in the body and brain, which can occur when a child experiences strong, frequent, and/or prolonged adversity without adequate adult support. Toxic stress can disrupt brain development and increase the risk of numerous physical and mental health issues (Shonkoff et al., 2012). The effects of toxic stress on the developing brain can include alterations in brain structure and function, particularly in areas

involved in emotion regulation, executive function, and memory. These changes can result in long-term difficulties with learning, behavior, and health.

Unaddressed childhood trauma can have long-lasting effects on an individual's mental and physical health, as well as their social and economic well-being. Research has shown that individuals who experience childhood trauma are at higher risk for developing mental health issues, such as PTSD, anxiety, and depression, later in life (Cossu et al., 2017). The long-term effects of childhood trauma on mental health can include increased vulnerability to stress, difficulties in emotion regulation, and impaired social functioning. Additionally, childhood trauma is associated with a higher risk of developing substance use disorders, eating disorders, and other behavioral health issues.

Childhood trauma can significantly impact attachment and developmental outcomes. Secure attachment in early childhood is crucial for healthy emotional and psychological development. Trauma can disrupt the formation of secure attachments, leading to attachment disorders and difficulties in forming healthy relationships (Bowlby, 1982). Children who experience trauma may develop insecure attachment patterns, such as anxious, avoidant, or disorganized attachment, which can affect their ability to form trusting and stable relationships throughout life. These attachment difficulties can contribute to a range of emotional and behavioral problems, including difficulties with self-regulation, aggression, and social withdrawal.

Studies have shown that childhood trauma can affect cognitive and emotional development, resulting in difficulties with learning, behavior, and social interactions. Children who experience trauma may struggle with self-regulation, exhibit aggressive behaviors, and have lower academic performance (Perry, 2006). The impact of trauma on cognitive development can include difficulties with attention, memory, and executive function, which can affect academic

performance and learning outcomes. Additionally, trauma-affected children may experience emotional dysregulation, manifesting as mood swings, irritability, and difficulty managing emotions.

The impact of childhood trauma is particularly significant in immigrant populations. Childhood trauma, including exposure to violence, displacement, and loss, can have a profound impact on the emotional well-being and psychological development of individuals, especially in the context of migration. The experience of migration itself can be traumatic, as individuals may face separation from family and familiar surroundings, language barriers, discrimination, and the challenge of adapting to a new culture and society (Kronick, 2017). Immigrant children and adolescents may experience multiple layers of trauma, including pre-migration trauma, migration-related trauma, and post-migration stressors. These experiences can contribute to mental health issues such as PTSD, depression, anxiety, and adjustment disorders.

Research has shown that childhood trauma is a significant factor that can impact the mental health of individuals, including immigrants. Individuals who experience trauma during childhood are at higher risk for developing mental health issues later in life (Fanfan, 2018). The cumulative effects of trauma and the stress of migration can exacerbate mental health problems and create barriers to accessing mental health care. Immigrant families may face additional challenges in seeking and receiving mental health services due to cultural differences, language barriers, and limited access to resources.

3.0 Journal Article

The Unseen Wounds: Investigating the Influence of Unaddressed Trauma on the Adjustment and Resilience of Haitian Immigrants in Maryland

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3.1 Abstract

Introduction: Migration, especially in childhood, can lead to complex psychological challenges of resilience, struggle, and identity. Haitians are at an elevated risk of psychological distress, often exacerbated by acculturation stress and past trauma. With over 20,000 Haitian immigrants residing in Maryland, their experiences of psychological distress remain unexplored. Given the recent influx of Haitian immigrants and the adversities they face both pre- and post-migration, understanding their psychological well-being and success in adulthood is crucial. This investigation sought to explore their social and psychological adjustments and assess the potential long-term impact of childhood migration.

Methods: Using qualitative methods, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 Haitian immigrants in Maryland, aged 18-65 who migrated as children to the U.S. This study explored their mental health, social adaptation, and resilience. Each interview was transcribed and meticulously reviewed to ensure accuracy. Through thematic analysis, key codes such as "felt isolated," "struggled with identity," and "missed Haiti" were identified through repeated reading and data immersion. These codes were organized into coherent themes, refined, and defined to accurately reflect the participants' experiences. The final analysis provided a comprehensive overview of the challenges and coping mechanisms of Haitian immigrants adapting to life in the United States.

Results: Finding highlighted a significant sense of detachment and lack of community, with many relying on religion amidst poverty and language barriers. Despite hardships in Haiti, participants reported a higher sense of fulfillment there compared to their experiences in the U.S., illustrating the complex nature of migration and acculturation.

Discussion: The study reveals the paradox of migration: the search for a better life often leads to new challenges. It underscores the importance of social support networks and culturally specific interventions to mitigate mental health issues and isolation. Further studies is needed to examine the role of cultural retention and community bonding in enhancing the integration and heritage preservation of Haitian immigrants, and its contribution to health equity, and the psychosocial experiences of migrants.

3.2 Introduction

Immigration has long been a topic of discussion and study, with a particular focus on the challenges faced by immigrant populations in maintaining, succeeding, and adapting to their new lives in the United States. However, recent research has highlighted the impact of unaddressed trauma on the mental health and well-being of immigrants, particularly those from countries with a history of political turmoil and violence. The increase in mental health concerns among immigrant populations has become a pressing issue that requires further study, to ensure interventions address mental health concerns in a culturally appropriate manner.

3.2.1 Immigration Process and Challenges

Immigration is a complex process that involves leaving one's home country and resettling in a new environment. Thousands of immigrants migrate to the United States every year seeking opportunities and a better life. The experiences these people face before, during, and after migration can impact their ability to properly adapt to life in the United States and ultimately achieve their goal of a better life. This transition can significantly impact an individual's mental health and well-being. Immigrants often experience difficult post-migration circumstances such as family separation, cultural and language barriers, and adjustment to a new, and occasionally hostile environment. These pressures could worsen existing mental health issues or trigger new ones (Derr, 2016).

3.2.2 Vulnerability of Immigrant Youth

Immigrant and U.S.-born children and adolescents of immigrants are particularly vulnerable to mental health challenges. Research has shown that trauma experienced in childhood can have long-lasting effects on mental health and well-being. Childhood trauma can lead to negative outcomes such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in adulthood (Felitti et al., 1998).

Many immigrant teens and young adults that migrate to the United States as children are more likely to fall into risky behaviors such as unsafe sex, fighting, drinking, and driving, smoking, and drug use. This population also faces a higher risk of bullying, homelessness, and unemployment. At the same time, many migrated to the United States with only one parent or alone, set back several grades in school, or left a steady/prosperous life to move into poverty.

According to a report by the National Alliance of Mental Illness, immigrant youth are at higher risk for developing mental health issues than their U.S.-born peers due to the stressors of migration and acculturation, which involves adapting to a new culture while maintaining one's original cultural identity, as well as the lack of access to mental health services. In fact, immigrant youth experience higher rates of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation than their U.S.-born counterparts (Garcia, Prado & Szapocznik, 2016).

Research shows that immigrants who experience depression and anxiety tend to have difficulty concentrating in school and may be at a higher risk of dropping out. One study found that unaddressed mental health needs among immigrant youth can lead to poor academic performance, social isolation, and even suicide (Cuevas et al., 2016). The lack of mental health services for immigrants can have a broader impact on public health, as untreated mental health

conditions can lead to increased healthcare costs and decreased productivity (Cummings et al., 2013).

3.2.3 Challenges for Haitian Immigrants

Haitian immigrants in the United States face many challenges, including language barriers, limited access to healthcare, and discrimination. Many Haitian immigrants also experience trauma, including pre-migration experiences such as political violence and persecution, and post-migration experiences such as racism, poverty, and social isolation. These experiences can have significant impacts on the mental health and well-being of Haitian immigrants (Degerville, 2023).

It's well-documented that refugee and immigrant children face numerous challenges. These children have diverse needs, including proper housing, healthcare, food, education, and basic security. According to Fawzi et al. (2009), they also require mental health services and support programs to prevent poor psychosocial health outcomes. These outcomes can include depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, conduct problems, difficulties relating to adults and/or peers, attention problems, difficulty concentrating, and poor school performance. A study focusing on the prevalence of depression and PTSD among Haitian youth in Boston public schools found that nearly 8% of this population demonstrated comorbid PTSD and depression. Of this population, only 1.8% reported having seen a mental health professional despite the high prevalence of PTSD and depression (2009).

Studies conducted among survivors of earthquakes like that of the 2010 earthquake elsewhere in the world demonstrated that children and adolescents present relatively high prevalence rates of symptoms of PTSD, depression, anxiety, and other mental health problems (Blanc et al, 2020). In Haiti, studies conducted several months to several years after the tragedy

show that children and adolescents present prevalence rates of PTSD symptoms ranging from 36.95 % to 59.9% as well as high levels of depression and anxiety (2017). Compared to adults, children tended to have higher prevalence of PTSD and depression. A study conducted four years after the 2010 Haiti earthquake highlighted significant mental health challenges among children and adolescents. The research by Blanc et al. (2014) found that 24% of children and adolescents exhibited symptoms of depression, 48% showed signs of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and 41% experienced anxiety. These high rates of psychological distress underscore the long-term impact of natural disasters on young populations, necessitating ongoing mental health support and interventions (Cénat, 2019).

3.2.4 Research Gaps and Purpose

Despite the high prevalence of trauma among Haitian immigrants in the United States, little research has been conducted on the impact of unaddressed childhood trauma on the adjustment and resilience of Haitian young adults who migrated to the United States as children.

The purpose of this research study is to investigate the potential impact of unaddressed trauma on the adjustment and resilience of Haitians ages 18 to 65 living in Maryland who migrated to the United States as children. The aim is to understand the long-term effects of trauma and how it may influence the participants' psychological well-being and ability to adjust to a new culture. This study seeks to provide insights into the factors that contribute to resilience among immigrant populations and inform interventions that can support the mental health of immigrant communities.

3.3 Methods

This qualitative study was designed to explore the migration experiences of Haitian immigrants who moved to the United States as children or adolescents and are now between the ages of 18 and 65. The study adopted a qualitative approach to allow for an in-depth understanding of the personal, social, and economic impacts of migration on these individuals. This approach is particularly suited for capturing detailed narratives and the nuanced experiences and perspectives of the participants, which is essential for understanding the complexities of migration and adaptation.

3.3.1 Recruitment

Eligible participants were Haitian immigrants currently living in Maryland or who had lived in Maryland in the last 10 years and migrated to the United States as children or adolescents, defined in this study as anyone under the age of 17. I focused on this age range because it includes individuals who experienced significant developmental stages in both Haiti and the United States, providing a comprehensive context for exploring their adaptation processes.

To recruit participants, I used both direct and indirect methods to ensure a diverse sample. Direct contact was made via phone calls, text messages, and emails. Additionally, recruitment materials, including flyers and a video, were posted on social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. These posts were widely shared, including reposts by community organizations like the Holiness Church of God of Bethlehem, which helped reach a broader audience.

Potential participants expressed interest by completing an online interest form designed to confirm eligibility. The form included eleven questions assessing basic criteria such as age,

migration history, and current residency in Maryland. Eligible individuals were contacted via email or phone to schedule a virtual interview. Most interviews were scheduled in the evenings or on weekends to accommodate the participants' work schedules.

Despite these efforts, I faced significant challenges in recruitment. Many prospective participants expressed fear of being identified based on their experiences and hesitated to participate due to concerns about being recorded. Even after explaining the process and ensuring confidentiality, several individuals backed out or stopped responding to calls and emails. Initially, I aimed to recruit 20 participants but ultimately secured only 12. The pushback and fear from potential participants highlighted the sensitive nature of the topic and the need for building trust and ensuring confidentiality in qualitative research.

3.3.2 Data Collection

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted virtually through Zoom, providing flexibility and accessibility. Before each interview, I collected demographic information using a structured questionnaire (Appendix B), which (Appendix A) included age, gender, education, employment status, and other relevant details. This demographic data provided essential context for understanding each participant's background.

The semi-structured interview format allowed for both consistency and depth. Interview questions were designed to explore the psychological, social, and economic aspects of migration (Appendix A). The questions were adapted from the "Moving Stories: Interview Questions" provided by Reimagining Migration, Question Set Two, and tailored to fit the context of this study. Example of the questions include:

1. **How did you manage the feelings of separation from your homeland and loved ones?** (Psychological Aspect: This question addresses the emotional and mental health challenges faced due to separation from one's homeland and loved ones, focusing on coping mechanisms.)
2. **Describe the support network you had. Did you feel supported by family, friends, or community groups?** (Social Aspect: This question examines the presence and impact of social support networks, including family, friends, and community groups, on the participants' adaptation process.)
3. **Upon arrival in the United States what were some immediate difficulties you encountered?** (Economic Aspect: This question explores the initial financial and logistical challenges faced upon arrival.)

These questions aimed to elicit detailed responses about the participants' migration experiences and adaptation processes.

All interviews were conducted in a mixture of English and Haitian Creole, though English was primarily spoken, as all participants were proficient in English. Each interview was audio recorded with the participants' verbal consent obtained before recording. The average duration of each interview was 60 minutes, with a range of 45 to 90 minutes. This transcription process ensured that the nuanced details of each participant's experiences were captured, facilitating a systematic analysis of the data.

3.3.3 Data Analysis

The qualitative analysis approach I used in this study was thematic analysis, a method particularly suited for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within qualitative data. Thematic analysis provides a flexible and detailed account of the data, allowing for a rich and nuanced understanding of the participants' experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach involves several systematic steps, beginning with data familiarization and extending through to the generation of final themes.

The data collected from the interviews were initially transcribed from Zoom recordings. Zoom created a transcript for each recording, which I reviewed alongside the recording to ensure accuracy. Initial thoughts, observations, and ideas were noted during this process. This thorough review process enabled me to capture the nuances of each participant's narrative.

Following transcription, I engaged in a thorough reading and re-reading of the transcripts, achieving data immersion and a deep understanding of the content. This immersion phase was crucial for the subsequent coding process. During the coding phase, I identified key features of the data relevant to the research question. I gave the entire data set equal attention to ensure comprehensive consideration of repeated patterns. Notable codes that emerged included "felt isolated," "struggled with identity," "missed Haiti," "parents worked hard," "did not seek professional help," "found support from teachers," and "happy childhood."

The next stage involved searching for broader themes, which explained larger sections of the data by combining similar or related codes. All initial codes pertinent to the research question were organized into coherent themes. The development of thematic maps during this stage helped me visualize and explore the links and relationships between themes. I discarded themes lacking sufficient data support or that were too diverse.

The refinement of themes occurred on two levels. First, I ensured the coherence of the coded data within each theme. Second, I considered the themes in relation to the entire data set to confirm they accurately reflected the overall data. I performed additional coding to ensure no important codes were overlooked.

Once a clear idea of the various themes and their interconnections emerged, I moved the analysis to the next phase. This involved defining and naming the themes, with each theme clearly defined and accompanied by a detailed analysis. I considered the relationships between individual

themes and the overall narrative to ensure a cohesive story. Developing concise, impactful names for each theme was prioritized to convey their essence effectively.

Saturation was not reached in this study. The data presented new perspectives, particularly highlighting a gap in information from individuals who left difficult life conditions, those who did not find solace in religion, and those who may have walked away from their faith. These gaps indicate the need for further data collection to fully capture the diverse experiences and challenges faced by Haitian immigrants

3.4 Ethics

This study received IRB approval from the University of Pittsburgh (Approval number: STUDY23020181) and was funded by the Mid-Atlantic Regional Public Health Training Center (MAR-PHTC). Participants who completed the interview were given a \$20 incentive as a token of appreciation for their time and effort. Informed consent was obtained verbally, ensuring participants understood the study's purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits. They were assured that participation was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without penalty.

Data confidentiality was a priority throughout the study. Personal identifiers were removed, and unique codes were assigned to each participant to protect their identities. Audio recordings and transcriptions of the interviews were securely stored and anonymized to maintain privacy. Recognizing the sensitive nature of discussing trauma and migration, participants were informed they could skip any questions or stop the interview at any time if they felt uncomfortable. Additionally, mental health resources were made available to any participant who experienced distress during or after the interview.

To ensure clear communication and comfort, interviews were conducted in the participant's preferred language, either English or Haitian Creole. This cultural sensitivity was crucial in making participants feel understood and respected. Throughout the study, the research team adhered to ethical principles, respecting the dignity and rights of all participants and ensuring their well-being was always prioritized.

3.5 Results

The analysis revealed several themes, including the profound sense of isolation, the burden of early responsibility, the struggle with mental health issues, the significant influence of educators, and a deep nostalgia for life in Haiti. These insights are supported by quotes from the participants, whose names have been changed to aliases to protect their confidentiality. The following section provides a detailed overview of these critical aspects of their experiences.

3.5.1 Demographics

Participants in this study included Haitian immigrants in Maryland, aged between 18 and 65 years old, who migrated to the United States as children or adolescents (17 years or younger). A total of 12 participants were interviewed. Participants were predominantly female (67%) and between the ages of 25 and 34 (58%).

Educational attainment varied, with 42% holding a Bachelor's degree, 33% with some college, 17% with a Master's or PhD, and 8% with a technical certificate. Most were married (52.5%), and 83% were employed full-time.

Participants had mostly resided in the U.S. for over 20 years (58%), speaking mainly Haitian Creole at home (67%). The majority identified as Christian (83%) and felt connected to their community (92%). Migration years ranged from 1990 to 2020, with half arriving between 2000-2010, and most migrated as children aged 6-10 (58%). These demographics provide a snapshot of the participants' backgrounds, setting the context for their experiences.

Table 1: Participant Demographic Information

Participant Demographics		
Characteristics	Number	Percentage
<i>Age</i>		
18-24 years old	2	17%
25-34 years old	7	58%
35-44 years old	2	17%
45-54 years old	1	8%
<i>Gender Identity</i>		
Male	4	33%
Female	8	67%
<i>Highest Level of Education</i>		
Certificate/Technical School	1	8%
Some College	4	33%
Bachelor's Degree	5	42%
Masters/PhD	2	17%
<i>Marital Status</i>		
Single	8	32.5%
Married	4	52.5%
<i>Employment Status</i>		
Student	2	17%
Full-Time	10	83%
<i>Years in the US</i>		
6-10 years	1	8%
11-15 years	2	17%
15-20 years	2	17%
20+ years	7	58%
<i>Language Spoke at Home</i>		
English	2	25%
Haitian Creole	8	67%
Other: Mix of English/Haitian Creole	1	8%
<i>Religious Affiliation</i>		
Christian	10	83%
Catholic	1	8%
No Religious Affiliation	1	8%
<i>Identification with Haitian Community in Maryland</i>		
Yes	11	92%
No	1	8%
<i>Year of Migration</i>		
1990-1999	3	25%
2000-2010	6	50%
2011-2020	3	25%
<i>Age at Migration</i>		
6-10 years old	7	58%
11-14 years old	3	25%
15-17 years old	2	17%

3.5.2 Central Themes

3.5.2.1 Isolation

Isolation was a significant and recurring theme. Participants frequently described feelings of profound loneliness and disconnection from their social networks and emotional support systems. The transition from a community-centric culture in Haiti to the individualistic society of the United States was a significant emotional hurdle.

Jean, who often felt the weight of this transition, explained, "The U.S. encourages individuality, which discourages asking for help. My household's problems are our own, and people here aren't as willing to support you as they would back home." This cultural shift left many participants feeling unsupported and alone.

The emotional impact of family separation compounded this isolation. Alex shared, "Being away from my family made me feel so alone. It was hard to connect with people who didn't share my background." Mia described her sense of invisibility, saying, "There were days when I wouldn't speak to anyone. People here just don't understand me. It felt like I was invisible."

The absence of parental support was another critical factor. Many participants felt their parents were too preoccupied with work and survival to provide the emotional support they needed. Emma explained, "My parents were always working. They provided for us, but I felt emotionally abandoned." James added, "I had to figure everything out on my own because my mom was too busy trying to make ends meet." Participants made it a point to express that they did not hold this against their parents or blamed them. Emma shared "Don't get me wrong, I don't blame my parents or hold anything against them. I can't expect them to give me something they don't know how to give."

Feelings of loneliness and disconnection had a significant impact on the participants' mental health and well-being. Many turned to faith or internalized their struggle's, as seeking help was often stigmatized. Janet shared that she tends to feel alone and does not know who to talk to about things, but believes God tends to place people to come to your aid and help you work things out. Several male participants shared a sense of safety or protection in not sharing or discussing their problems. Alex noted, " going though things alone is my way of protecting others from my pain."

The lack of social support extended beyond the family to broader social networks. Tyra shared, "Making friends was incredibly difficult. People here already had their groups, and it felt like there was no space for someone new like me." The participants' narratives reflected a common struggle to find their place in a society that often seemed indifferent to their presence.

3.5.2.2 Forced to Mature Quickly

The need to mature quickly was a striking and recurring theme in the narratives of the participants, illustrating the immense pressures faced by young immigrants thrust into adult roles prematurely. These roles often included translating for their parents, handling important documentation, and caring for younger siblings, which placed significant responsibilities on their young shoulders.

Emma's story highlights the burden of early responsibility: "When we moved here, my parents had to work multiple jobs, so I became responsible for my younger siblings. It was hard balancing school and taking care of them." Emma describing having to take her siblings to school, make meals for them, taking them to and from doctors' appointments while managing her own life responsibilities including maintaining a good grades, going to work and keeping up with responsibilities at church.

The participants often had to manage household chores, act as intermediaries for their non-English-speaking parents and navigate complex bureaucracies. Mark shared his experiences of having to fill out paperwork and navigate important phone calls for his parents because of the language barrier. He stated, "It was stressful because I didn't always understand everything either". This premature assumption of adult responsibilities effectively curtailed their childhoods. Lucy poignantly expressed this loss, saying, "I wish I had the chance to just be a kid. I may have been 12 but I never felt 12." Alex reflected on the pressures of these roles, "Handling adult responsibilities at a young age was tough, but it made me who I am today."

Participants described feeling torn between their duties at home and their academic responsibilities. Emma reflected, "My parents relied on me for everything because they couldn't navigate the new environment on their own. I was just a kid, but I had to act like an adult." This dual pressure often left them feeling overwhelmed and stressed, impacting their overall development and well-being.

In Haiti, many of the participants had a more privileged upbringing with household help to manage chores and responsibilities. The stark contrast between their life in Haiti and the expectations placed on them in the U.S. was jarring. Jean noted, "I had to be an adult quickly because we didn't have maids like in Haiti. My mom had to do more than she did back then."

The emotional burden of these responsibilities often extended beyond logistical tasks to providing emotional support to their parents. Lucy shared, "I had to be the emotional rock for my family, comforting my siblings and even my parents when things got tough."

Additionally, the participants had to navigate the educational system while balancing these responsibilities. Mark stated, "I struggled to keep up with my schoolwork because I had so many other responsibilities at home. It felt like there was no time to just be a student." This often resulted

in academic struggles and a sense of isolation, as they felt disconnected from their peers who did not share these burdens.

Despite these challenges, many participants viewed their experiences as formative. Tyra reflected, "Growing up quickly made me resilient. It was hard, but it taught me to handle adversity." Similarly, Alex noted, "Handling adult responsibilities at a young age was tough, but it made me who I am today."

3.5.2.3 Battling Mental Health in Silence

Mental health struggles were a prominent theme among participants, who said they often battled issues such as anxiety, depression, and trauma in silence due to cultural stigma and a lack of resources. Substance abuse emerged as a significant coping mechanism for some, highlighting the severe emotional toll of their experiences. The reliance on faith was also common, as participants often turned to prayer instead of seeking professional help.

Emma highlighted the psychological stress associated with migration, stating, "Being in America was more traumatizing than being in Haiti as a kid." Pierce expressed a deep sense of unresolved grief, saying, "I never stopped grieving my life in Haiti. I'm honestly just here. If things were better, and if I had the means, I would have gone back years ago." The cultural expectation to "push through" without seeking help was pervasive. As Mark noted, "It's just what you do. Push through and do what you have to do. I truly don't know how else to do it."

The stigma surrounding mental health in the Haitian community was identified as a significant barrier to seeking help. Brenda noted, "Talking about mental health is not common in our culture, so it was hard to seek help." This sentiment was echoed by Alex, who shared, "When I tried to share with my parents what I was feeling, they told me to just pray." Tyra added, "I had a therapist in undergrad who was sweet. I just never felt comfortable sharing because she just

wouldn't get it." The misunderstanding of mental health concerns and lack of knowledge of the experiences of immigrants exacerbated these issues. Tyra shared that, "Americans or people who have not experienced life in countries like Haiti will never understand." This sentiment highlights the gap in culturally competent care and the difficulty in finding therapists who truly understand the different struggles Haitian immigrants face.

Substance abuse was a recurring theme among participants who struggled with their mental health. Alex, who identified as a member of the LGBTQIA community, recounted the harrowing experience of coming out to his family, which resulted in significant emotional toll and reliance on alcohol. "I turned to alcohol because it felt like my family had abandoned me. It was the only way I could numb the pain," they shared. Mia recounted growing up with a parent who struggled with alcohol addiction: "My dad would come home drunk almost every night. It created a tense and unstable environment. He refused to seek help, believing it was a sign of weakness. It was hard to watch and even harder to live through."

Participants also recounted their traumatic experiences during the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. Four participants described the trauma of losing friends, seeing dead bodies, and being unable to contact family for several days. Janet vividly recalled losing her best friend who died at school and the emotional challenge of returning to the same classroom where her friend had died, with an expectation to focus on schoolwork. These traumatic experiences left deep emotional scars, yet the cultural expectation to "push through" remained strong.

The fear of being judged or misunderstood often kept participants from speaking out about their struggles. Lucy noted, "I felt like if I talked about my anxiety, people would think I was weak. So, I kept it to myself and just tried to deal with it." This lack of open discussion about mental health led many to suffer in silence, compounding their distress.

The participants emphasized the need for culturally sensitive mental health services. Those who did seek services expressed difficulty connecting with therapists who lacked understanding of their cultural background. Tyra explained, " It's hard to explain to someone my pain and educate them on why I act or think a certain way as well."

3.5.2.4 The Impact of Educators

Participants shared that educators played a pivotal role in their lives, providing significant support and encouragement. Some of the participants emphasized how positive interactions with teachers often provided the stability and motivation needed to succeed. Lucy shared, "My high school teacher was like a second mother to me. She helped me with my English, encouraged me to pursue higher education, and was always there when I needed advice." Emma highlighted the support of her ESL teacher, stating, "I will never forget my ESL teacher. She was more than a teacher; she truly took care of me."

Participants described the emotional support they received from their teachers and school officials as transformative. Maria recounted, "My guidance counselor was amazing. She helped me apply for scholarships and encouraged me to go to college." However, not all experiences with educators were positive. Some participants recounted detrimental comments from teachers that motivated them to prove them wrong, while others felt discouraged by their educators' low expectations. Tyra remembered, "One of my teachers told me, 'You're Haitian, I do not expect much from you.' That comment pushed me to excel academically." Mark shared a similar experience, "A teacher once said, 'You just need to do enough to pass because you won't make it through college anyway.' That hurt, and it took some time to get pass that and be motivated to do well in school".

Economic and educational challenges were significant aspects of the participants' experiences. Many faced barriers to stable employment and had to navigate the complexities of revalidating their educational credentials. Janet migrated to the U.S in her late teens and completed much of her secondary education in Haiti. Unfortunately, at 17 years old she had to start high school all over again. Her education in Haiti was not recognized in the U.S. "When I moved here, I had to go back to ninth grade. I hated it. I had to redo all of high school, and I didn't have a choice because nobody knew how to navigate that part". John described watching his dad a man who was educated with a degree in Haiti, come here and work low-end jobs because his degree was not recognized. Although his dad attempted to go back to school, he eventually stopped going to focus on maintaining and providing for the household.

3.5.2.5 Nostalgia for Haiti

Despite the myriad challenges faced in their homeland, many participants held a deep-seated nostalgia for their lives in Haiti. This longing was often intertwined with memories of a more comfortable and community-centered existence, contrasting sharply with their experiences in the U.S.

Mia described her childhood in Haiti as idyllic, saying, "I was living the good life. We had a nice house. I was wearing cute clothes, and I had a lot of friends. I went to a really good school." She reminisced about the vibrant social life and the sense of belonging that she felt in her close-knit community. Similarly, Christina expressed a yearning for the simplicity and community spirit of Haiti, noting, "During that time, Haiti was pretty sweet. We always had neighbors around, and the kids played outside together. It was a very open and interactive environment".

For many, the move to the United States was abrupt and disorienting. Participants described how their families made the decision to migrate without fully consulting them, leading to feelings

of confusion and loss. Lucy recalled, "When I came to America, it was like, why are you ripping me away from all my friends and everything I know? I don't understand what's happening to me." This sentiment of being uprooted without adequate explanation or preparation was common. Alex recalled his migration experience "My dad called one day and said we are moving. We were told not to go to school the next day and not to pack anything because everything we needed was in the U.S."

In Haiti, many participants lived relatively affluent lives, complete with household help and a certain level of privilege. This shift from a life of comfort to one of self-sufficiency was a significant and challenging transition. Emma reflected on this stark contrast, saying, "We had maids who did everything for us – cooked, cleaned, and even bathed us. Coming to the U.S. and having to do all these things on my own was a huge adjustment".

The sense of community and interconnectedness in Haiti was a recurring theme. fondly remembered, "In Haiti, I had more friends. It was like a community – everyone knew everyone, and the houses were close together. Here, I can go outside and never see my neighbors". This loss of community was felt deeply, as the participants adjusted to the more individualistic and isolating nature of life in the U.S.

Some participants spoke about the practical aspects of life in Haiti that they missed. Lucy shared, "In Haiti, we had fruit trees everywhere. If we wanted to make a papaya smoothie, we just picked the fruits from the trees. It was so different from here". This connection to the land and the ease of access to fresh food were elements of their past lives that participants longed for.

Christina articulated a broader perspective on the challenges faced in the U.S., stating, "If Haiti was safe right now, I would have strongly debated going back. Life here is overwhelming and filled with a lot of nonsense that I don't have to deal with in Haiti". This sentiment highlighted

the ongoing internal conflict many participants felt, weighing the safety and opportunities of the U.S. against the comfort and simplicity of their lives in Haiti.

For others, the decision to move was tied to seeking better educational opportunities. Christelle recounted, "My parents moved us here because they wanted us to have a better education and more opportunities. But I didn't have a choice. They told me we were leaving, and that was it". This lack of agency in such a significant life decision contributed to the sense of dislocation and longing for their homeland.

The narrative of missing the communal and supportive environment of Haiti was pervasive. Maria's reflection encapsulated this, "In Haiti, it felt like one big family. Here, everyone is more isolated. I miss the sense of belonging and the community spirit". This sense of loss was not just about missing physical spaces or routines but also about the deeper connections and cultural ties that were left behind.

3.5.2.6 Social Adaptation and Belonging

Adapting to life in the United States was a multifaceted challenge for the participants, encompassing language barriers, cultural adjustments, and the struggle to find a sense of belonging. For many, the journey began with the daunting task of learning a new language. Tyra, who moved to the U.S. at a young age, found that language acquisition came somewhat naturally. "I came here when I was like seven. Adaptation, I feel like, in terms of language-wise came pretty easily. Because you're a kid, you kind of soak it all up".

However, for older participants, the language barrier proved more formidable. James, reflecting on his experiences, noted, "I had a lot of challenges. I didn't know the language. I didn't have anybody to help me at home". The necessity to quickly grasp English to navigate daily life and education systems added an extra layer of stress.

Adjusting to the cultural differences was another significant hurdle. Christina mentioned the differing family dynamics and expectations between Haitian and American cultures, saying, "Your parents grew up in Haiti. They lived their adult life there. You're growing up here and living your adult life here. The things that they went through are different from the things that you went through. And so the expectations that they have for you in your life are a bit different". This generational and cultural gap often led to misunderstandings and conflicting expectations.

Lucy emphasized the cultural shock experienced upon arrival in the U.S., highlighting the stark differences between the two countries, "Coming here was a complete culture shock. There are things that are normal here that just don't happen or are as open in Haiti. It took me a while to understand the LGBTQIA community and all the different components; it is just not something we deal with in Haiti". This sentiment was echoed by other participants who found themselves grappling with new social norms and practices.

Navigating the educational system in the U.S. was particularly challenging. Alex shared his struggles with adapting to the school environment, "It was really tough, even for school. The thing that I missed...I didn't have no other person or other people that could help me. Especially in school, I could take advantage of a lot of things, but I didn't know". The lack of guidance and support made it difficult for many participants to leverage available resources and opportunities.

The sense of community that many had enjoyed in Haiti was often missing in their new environment. Emma spoke about the feeling of isolation despite being surrounded by people, "In Haiti, I had more friends. It was like a community – everyone knew everyone, and the houses were close together. Here, I can go outside and never see my neighbors". This loss of close-knit community ties made the adaptation process more challenging.

Despite these hurdles, participants found solace and a sense of belonging through engagement with the Haitian community, primarily through church and family gatherings. Mia shared, "I feel like the engagement is mostly either through family, in terms of attending family events and meeting other Haitians there, or church". Church not only served as a place of worship but also as a crucial support network where participants could meet others who shared their experiences and cultural background.

Participants also faced practical challenges, such as not knowing where to go for various services and having to move in with siblings and extended family members they did not know. Maria reflected on this, saying, "I think it was getting to know places, like where to go for different services". The lack of guidance on how to access essential services such as food stamps, Medicaid, and other social services compounded the difficulties of adaptation. When Alex migrated to the U.S, he joined his other siblings who migrated prior. Not only did he not have a relationship with them, but under one roof, they struggled to get along because they were all raised differently and had different norms and expectations that lead to a lot of arguments and statements such as " My mother did not raise me like that."

Finding and maintaining friendships and family relationships in a new culture was another aspect of social adaptation. Brenda spoke about the changes she had to make to keep her friendships alive, "I have to reach out to them. I can't just be like, 'Oh, she's probably busy. Let me not call her. Let me not bother her,' but if she's busy, she'll see that I call. She'll see that I was thinking about her at least."

The adaptation process also involved changing personal behaviors and mentalities. As Tyra noted, "I think a lot of it is also just me changing my mentality on how I see things and not letting things become a big deal when they're not". This mental shift was crucial for navigating the

complexities of life in a new country. Alex, the only participant who did not identify as a member of the Haitian community described his experience leaving the community. He expressed not feeling accepted or loved due to his identify. “My community was the church, and it just does not feel like home anymore. It hasn’t for a long time”.

Despite these challenges, participants found ways to adapt and build new lives for themselves in the U.S. For some, this meant seeking support within their immediate circles. Jean mentioned, "If I need help, I go around my circle because I have managed to have a good group of people around". Others were able to build and establish themselves with different communities where they felt loved and appreciated as Alex described. This reliance on close-knit support networks was a key strategy for overcoming the difficulties of adaptation.

3.6 Discussion

This study aimed to explore the multifaceted experiences of Haitian immigrants in Maryland, focusing on the psychological, social, and economic impacts of migration. Through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, we gained a comprehensive understanding of the participants' lives, highlighting several key themes including isolation, early responsibility, mental health struggles, the influence of educators, and nostalgia for Haiti. These themes are supported by participant quotes, with aliases used to maintain confidentiality.

3.6.1 Isolation

Isolation was a pervasive theme among participants, who described profound loneliness and disconnection from social networks and emotional support systems. The transition from Haiti's community-centric culture to the individualistic society of the United States was particularly challenging. The sense of isolation was exacerbated by family separation and the absence of parental support due to work commitments. This experience aligns with Portes and Rumbaut's (2014) study, which found that immigrants often face heightened isolation due to cultural differences and the lack of extended family networks prevalent in their countries of origin. This shift can lead to significant emotional and psychological stress, highlighting the importance of community networks in mitigating these feelings.

Research by Suárez-Orozco, Yoshikawa, and Tseng (2015) supports this, demonstrating that family separation often leads to increased loneliness and vulnerability, impacting mental health and social integration. Moreover, economic pressures on parents, as highlighted by Chaudry et al. (2010), often result in children taking on adult responsibilities prematurely, further contributing to emotional strain and a sense of isolation.

However, some participants found solace in their faith, suggesting that spiritual and community-based support systems play a crucial role in coping with isolation. This finding is consistent with Cénat et al. (2019), who emphasized the significant role of community and faith-based support systems in promoting resilience among Haitian immigrants. Additionally, while the negative impacts of isolation are well-documented, Berry's (1997) acculturation framework posits that immigrants who engage in both their original and new cultures can develop bicultural identities, potentially reducing feelings of isolation. Furthermore, Chen and Choi (2011) found that social media platforms help maintain connections with homeland networks while facilitating

new connections in the host country, suggesting that digital connectivity can alleviate feelings of isolation. The study did not discuss the impact of social media, but this is an important topic to explore in future studies.

3.6.2 Forced to Mature Quickly

Another prominent theme was the necessity for young immigrants to mature quickly, illustrating the immense pressures on them as they assume adult roles prematurely. Participants often had to translate for their parents, handle important documentation, and care for younger siblings. This mirrors Orellana's (2009) findings on the roles of cultural and linguistic brokering assumed by immigrant children. Such responsibilities can significantly impact their development and well-being, often leading to academic struggles and high levels of stress, as found by Hao and Bonstead-Bruns (1998).

Despite these burdens, some research suggests that early responsibilities can foster resilience and a strong work ethic. Fuligni (1997) argued that children who take on significant family responsibilities may develop better problem-solving skills and a stronger work ethic. This duality in outcomes indicates that early maturation can have both positive and negative impacts, depending on the support systems in place.

The stark contrast between participants' privileged upbringings in Haiti and their new roles in the U.S. underscores the drastic changes in their daily lives and the psychological toll it takes. This shift from a life of relative ease to one of significant responsibility is consistent with Menjívar's (2000) research on Salvadoran immigrants, which highlights how the loss of social status and comfort exacerbates the challenges of adapting to life in a new country.

3.6.3 Battling Mental Health in Silence

Mental health struggles were a significant concern, with participants often battling anxiety, depression, and trauma in silence due to cultural stigma and lack of resources. This stigma was a substantial barrier, preventing many from seeking help, and leading some to turn to substance abuse as a coping mechanism. Alegría et al. (2007) found that cultural stigma and limited access to mental health services are major barriers preventing immigrants from seeking help, which aligns with the experiences of the participants.

Substance abuse as a coping mechanism was also noted by Williams and Mohammed (2009), who found that unaddressed mental health issues often lead to substance abuse in communities where seeking professional help is stigmatized. Furthermore, traumatic experiences from the 2010 Haiti earthquake left deep emotional scars, reinforcing the need for culturally sensitive mental health services. Galea et al. (2005) discuss the long-lasting mental health impacts of traumatic events, particularly when cultural norms discourage seeking help, underscoring the need for culturally sensitive mental health services.

While cultural stigma can drive community solidarity and mutual support, it also leads to the neglect of professional mental health care. Malviya (2023) argues that while faith provides emotional comfort, it should complement rather than replace professional mental health interventions. This highlights the need for integrative approaches that combine spiritual support with accessible mental health services tailored to the cultural contexts of Haitian immigrants.

3.6.4 Impact of Educators

Educators played a pivotal role in the lives of many participants, providing significant support and encouragement. Positive interactions with teachers often provided the stability and motivation needed to succeed. Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, and Todorova (2008) found that immigrant students who formed supportive relationships with educators were more likely to succeed academically and feel integrated into their school environments.

Some participants recounted demotivating comments from teachers that either spurred them to excel academically or led to feelings of discouragement. Tenenbaum and Ruck (2007) revealed that minority students often face lower expectations from teachers, which can hinder their academic progress and self-esteem. Steele and Aronson's (1995) research on stereotype threat further highlights how negative stereotypes can adversely affect academic performance by increasing anxiety and reducing motivation.

While overcoming low expectations can foster resilience and a strong work ethic, it underscores the need to eliminate these biases altogether. Rosenthal and Jacobson's (1968) seminal work on the Pygmalion effect highlights how positive expectations can enhance student performance, suggesting that supportive and encouraging educational environments are crucial for the success of immigrant students.

3.6.5 Nostalgia for Haiti

Despite the challenges faced in Haiti, many participants expressed deep nostalgia for their lives there. This sentiment of longing for the past aligns with Levitt and Glick Schiller's (2004)

findings that immigrants often idealize their homeland as a coping mechanism. This idealization can provide comfort and a sense of identity amidst the challenges of adaptation.

However, this nostalgia also highlights the internal conflict many participants feel, weighing the safety and opportunities in the U.S. against the comfort and simplicity of their lives in Haiti. Rumbaut (1994) posits that while nostalgia can provide emotional comfort, it can also prevent immigrants from fully engaging with and adapting to their new environment. This suggests a complex interplay between nostalgia and adaptation, where the emotional benefits must be balanced against potential drawbacks.

3.6.6 Social Adaption and Belonging

Adapting to life in the United States posed numerous challenges, including language barriers, cultural adjustments, and finding a sense of belonging. For many, the journey began with learning a new language, which added an extra layer of stress. Gándara and Contreras (2009) highlighted the difficulties immigrant students face in acquiring English proficiency and the impact this has on their academic success and social integration.

Adjusting to cultural differences was another significant hurdle, often leading to misunderstandings and conflicting expectations within families. Suárez-Orozco et al. (2015) found that cultural differences can create tensions and misunderstandings within immigrant families, affecting their overall well-being and integration. Despite these hurdles, participants found solace through engagement with the Haitian community, primarily through church and family gatherings, which provided crucial support and a sense of continuity.

However, some participants felt ostracized by their community, highlighting the complexities of belonging and the need for more inclusive community structures. Zhou and

Bankston (1998) demonstrated how ethnic communities serve as vital networks for social support, cultural continuity, and economic assistance, significantly enhancing the adaptation process. Yet, strong intra-group bonding can sometimes inhibit broader social integration, as noted by Putnam (2007). This underscores the need for strategies that balance intra-community support with opportunities for broader social engagement.

3.6.7 Implications

The findings of this study underscore the importance of social support networks and culturally specific interventions in mitigating mental health issues and isolation among Haitian immigrants. The significant role of faith and community in the participants' lives suggests that integrating these elements into support services could better address their challenges. Mental health services need to be both accessible and attuned to the cultural and linguistic needs of the Haitian community, ensuring that immigrants feel comfortable seeking help without the stigma often associated with mental health issues.

Programs that support immigrant families, especially those helping parents navigate their new environment, are crucial. Such programs can allow children to focus on their development and education rather than taking on adult responsibilities prematurely. Schools and community organizations must collaborate to provide resources and support, ensuring that young immigrants do not bear undue burdens.

Educational institutions have a pivotal role to play in supporting immigrant students. Training educators on cultural competence and the specific challenges faced by immigrant students can create a more supportive and inclusive learning environment. Educators who understand and

empathize with the immigrant experience can better support students academically and emotionally, fostering resilience and academic success.

Several programs have been developed to support immigrant students, both Haitian and from other backgrounds. For example, the Newcomer Program in the Boston Public Schools is designed specifically for newly arrived immigrant students, providing intensive English language instruction and support services to help them adjust to the new educational system (Boston Public Schools, 2021). Similarly, the International High School at LaGuardia Community College in New York offers a culturally responsive curriculum and supportive services to help immigrant students succeed (LaGuardia Community College, 2020).

Another example is the Bridging Cultures Project, which provides professional development for teachers to enhance their cultural competence and improve their ability to support immigrant students. This program emphasizes understanding the cultural backgrounds of students and integrating this knowledge into teaching practices (Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, & Hernandez, 2003).

Programs like these demonstrate the positive impact that culturally competent educational practices can have on immigrant students, helping them to overcome barriers and achieve their academic goals.

3.6.8 Limitations

This study has several limitations that must be acknowledged. Firstly, the small sample size and potential biases in self-reported data limit the generalizability of the findings. Participants may have underreported certain experiences due to concerns about confidentiality or fear of identification. Secondly, the study lacked representation from individuals who arrived illegally,

those on temporary status, and those not affiliated with any religion. These groups may have experiences and challenges that were not captured in this study.

Furthermore, the study did not include individuals who migrated within the last five years. The experiences of recent immigrants might differ significantly due to changes in immigration policies, socio-political climates, and economic conditions. Including these individuals in future research could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the Haitian immigrant experience.

Additionally, one important limitation is that saturation was not reached on several key topics. Specifically, the study did not achieve saturation regarding the long-term mental health impacts of unaddressed trauma and the role of community support systems in the adjustment process. This means that there may be additional perspectives and experiences related to these areas that were not fully explored. Future studies should aim to include a larger and more diverse sample of participants to achieve saturation and provide a more comprehensive understanding of these important issues.

3.6.9 Future Direction

Future research should aim to address the limitations identified in this study. Specifically, there is a need for larger, more diverse samples that include individuals who arrived illegally, those on temporary status, and those not affiliated with religion. Research should also focus on recent immigrants who have arrived in the last five years to capture the evolving dynamics of migration and adaptation.

Longitudinal studies tracking changes over time would provide valuable insights into the long-term impacts of migration on Haitian immigrants. Investigating the experiences of other immigrant communities could offer comparative insights, helping to identify common challenges

and effective strategies for integration. Additionally, developing culturally competent mental health services tailored to the specific needs of Haitian immigrants is essential. Integrating faith-based support systems and community engagement initiatives could enhance mental health outcomes and overall well-being.

Further exploration into the role of resilience and how early responsibilities shape long-term outcomes for immigrant youth could provide valuable insights. Understanding the factors influencing decisions to potentially return to Haiti versus staying in the U.S. would help in developing better support systems for immigrants facing such dilemmas. Research into these areas would contribute to more effective policies and interventions, ultimately aiding the successful integration and thriving of Haitian immigrants in their new environment.

3.7 Conclusions

Haitian Immigrants in Maryland experience profound isolation, early responsibilities, mental health struggles, the influence of educators, and nostalgia for Haiti. These insights underscore the importance of culturally sensitive support systems and targeted interventions to address the many challenges faced by Haitian immigrants. The integration of community and faith-based support, coupled with accessible mental health services, is crucial for fostering resilience and well-being in this population. Future research should focus on the long-term impacts of migration and the development of tailored interventions to enhance the integration and mental health outcomes of Haitian immigrants.

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4.0 Essay Conclusions

This study has provided an in-depth examination of the psychological, social, and economic impacts of migration on Haitian immigrants in Maryland. Through comprehensive interviews, several critical themes emerged, including profound isolation, the burden of early responsibility, mental health struggles, the influential role of educators, and a deep-seated nostalgia for Haiti. These themes highlight the complex interplay of challenges faced by this community and underscore the need for culturally sensitive support systems.

The findings reveal that isolation is a significant issue for Haitian immigrants, driven by cultural dissonance and the loss of social support systems from their homeland. This transition from a community-centric culture to an individualistic society in the U.S. presents substantial emotional hurdles. The early responsibilities thrust upon young immigrants, such as translating for parents and managing household chores, add to their stress and impact their academic and personal development. Despite these challenges, many participants displayed remarkable resilience.

Mental health struggles, exacerbated by cultural stigma and lack of resources, emerged as a critical concern. Participants often relied on faith and community support to cope with anxiety, depression, and trauma. This highlights the importance of integrating culturally competent mental health services that incorporate spiritual support.

Educators play a pivotal role in shaping the experiences of Haitian immigrant students. Positive interactions with teachers provided stability and motivation, while negative experiences sometimes spurred resilience. However, systemic biases within the educational system must be addressed to ensure equitable support for all students.

Nostalgia for Haiti is a common sentiment among participants, reflecting a longing for the comfort and community of their homeland. While nostalgia can provide emotional solace, it may also hinder full engagement with the host society, highlighting the need for balanced integration strategies.

Overall, the experiences of Haitian immigrants in Maryland underscore the importance of developing comprehensive support systems that address their cultural and emotional needs. By understanding these experiences, we can better support their integration and well-being, fostering resilience and a sense of belonging in their new environment.

Appendix A Interview Questions

1. **Origins and Motivation for Migration**

- Let's begin by discussing your origins. What was your day-to-day life in Haiti like, and what led to the decision to relocate to the United States?
- Before leaving Haiti, what were your hopes for life in the United States, especially in Maryland?
- Out of all the places in the United States, why was Maryland chosen as your new home?

2. **Journey and Initial Hardships**

- I'm interested in the story of your transition from Haiti. Who migrated with you? Did you have to leave anyone behind, and what was the hardest part of this move?
- How did you manage the feelings of separation from your homeland and loved ones?
- Upon arrival in the United States, what were some immediate difficulties you encountered?

3. **Early Settlement and Obstacles:**

- Can you tell me about the biggest problems you and your family faced while adjusting to life in the United States? Such as finances, employment, housing, etc.
- Was life in the U.S. like what you thought it would be before you came?
- Share your initial school experiences in the United States. Were there instances of bullying, and how did you handle them?

4. **Mental Health Awareness:**

- Since migrating to the U.S., have there been times when you felt really stressed, angry, worried, or sad? Can you tell me more about those times and how they affected your everyday life?
- Did you ever feel like you could not talk about or deal with these feelings? Is that still the case today?
- Have you or your family members shown any signs of having trouble dealing with previous or ongoing stress? This could be things like trouble sleeping or focusing, feeling pain, getting upset easily, or loss of appetite.

5. **Community Involvement and Overcoming Adversity:**
 - Discuss your engagement with the Haitian community in Maryland. How has this influenced your self-identity and sense of belonging?
 - What skills or strengths have you used to help you get through tough times in life?
6. **Challenges in Seeking Mental Health Support:**
 - What barriers have you faced in seeking mental health support?
 - From your perspective, how could mental health services be improved to better serve the Haitian population?
 - Describe the support network you had. Did you feel backed by family, friends, or community groups?
 - Did your schools' teachers and administration help you get used to going to school in the United States?
 - Looking back, what kind of support do you wish you had?
7. **Resilience and Coping Mechanisms:**
 - How have you coped during times of stress? Are there specific cultural practices or community support systems that you found helpful?
 - What signs of resilience do you see in your family and the Haitian community as a whole?
8. **Family Life and Cultural Connection:**
 - How has immigrating to the United States transformed your family life, and what role has your family played in your adaptation process?
 - Have local events or cultural traditions been instrumental in keeping you connected to your Haitian heritage?
9. **Reflection on Growth and Ambitions:**
 - With all the challenges you've faced, how do you think you've grown or become stronger as a person?
 - What are your hopes for the future, and what do you think might help or get in the way of reaching your goals?
10. **Guidance for Future Migrants and Local Insights:**

- What advice would you give to Haitians planning on migrating to the U.S.?
- What ideas or suggestions do you have that could improve the help given to immigrants by people in Maryland?

11. Risky Behaviors:

- Have you or any other immigrants you know ever found themselves exhibiting risky behaviors such as unsafe sex, driving under the influence, or excessive drinking/drug use? What do you think might cause someone to participate in these activities?

12. Concluding Remarks and Additional Insights:

- We've discussed a lot of different topics. Is there anything more you want to share about how you're feeling or getting used to life here as an immigrant?

Appendix B Demographic Questionnaire

1. How old are you in years?
 - 18-24
 - 25-34
 - 35-44
 - 45-54
 - 55-64
 - 65 or more

2. What is your gender identity?
 - Male
 - Female
 - Other: _____
 - Prefer not to say.

3. What is your marital status?
 - Single
 - Married
 - Separated
 - Divorced
 - Widowed

4. What is the highest education you completed?
 - None
 - Less than High School (Elementary or Middle school)
 - Some High School
 - High School Diploma
 - Certificate/Technical Program
 - Some College
 - Bachelor's Degree
 - Masters/PhD

5. What is your current employment status?
 - Student
 - Employed (Part-Time)
 - Employed (Full-Time)
 - Self-Employed
 - Homemaker

6. How many years have you been living in the United States?
 - Less than a year
 - 1-5 years
 - 6-10 years
 - 11-15 years
 - 15+ years

7. What is the language you speak most frequently at home?

- English
- Haitian Creole
- French
- Other: _____

8. What is your religious affiliation?

- Christian
- Catholic
- Muslim
- No religious affiliation
- Other: _____

9. Do you identify as a member of the Haitian Community in Maryland?

- Yes
- No

10. When did you migrate to the United States?

- 1960-1970
- 1971-1980
- 1981-1990
- 1991-2000
- 2001-2010
- 2011-2020
- 2021-2023

11. How old were you when you migrated to the United States?

- Less than 1 year
- 1-5 years old
- 6 -10 years old
- 11–14 years old
- 15-17 years old

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