Cultural diversity in Health Sciences

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# Introduction

The Jamaican culture, usually, is not that hard to understand. However, it is not as complicated as most cultures around the globe. Cultures have a tendency to be dynamic. The Jamaican culture is made of a mix of ethnicities that migrated to the island in the past century (Minkov & Hofstede, 2013).

Having gone through a period of both the Spanish and British Colonization, Jamaica has a deep history of cultural integration. The island itself, which lies south of Cuba, consists of fourteen Parishes. The population of the island is primarily black, along with a few East Indians, Whites and Chinese in the mix. The black demography primarily comprises of the descendants of the African slaves, which were brought onto the island by British Colonizers as a form of cheap labor. However, following its independence, Jamaica has grown into a developing country with a modern outlook on life while still being deeply rooted in its ethnic roots (Deipolyi, 2018). The Purnell Model of Cultural Competence (Purnell, 2005) analyzes the primary and secondary characteristics of a culture, which are vital to its survival. It includes the values, practices, cultures, beliefs, and norms of the system with regard to the cultural heritage of an individual. Thus, this paper seeks to address a number of constructs in the Jamaican culture with regard to the Purnell Model of Competence.

# Discussion

The primary purpose of this model is to ensure that a healthcare provider has a baseline to provide care to an individual belonging to a certain culture, based on their individual beliefs and cultural norms. This ensures that while standards of healthcare are maintained, the cultural norms and moral values are also complied with, especially to put the patients at ease (Purnell, 2005). Thus, here are the various constructs of Jamaican culture which need to be discussed in detail.

## The Family Unit in Jamaican Culture

The Jamaican culture is made up of an ethnically diverse society. Their culture is a mixture of a number of other cultures, and the various ethnic groups that have invaded the country overtime have only made this culture richer and more diverse. With regard to their religious affiliations, most of the population of the country identify with the Christian faith, with few even observing the Rastafarian belief system. Jamaicans have a complex family structure.

**Head of the Household**

The parental figures in the household hold autonomy with regard to the decision-making process, regardless of their age. This responsibility is taken seriously by the families and even extended family members are involved in the proper upbringing of children (Brown & Johnson, 2008).

**Gender Roles**

The male and the female members have their own set of responsibilities cut out for them. The oldest male sibling is held responsible for the right choice regarding the mate selection and education of the younger members of the family, while the right to make such decisions regarding this person rests with the parental authorities. On the other hand, the female sibling is seen as the caregiver in the family. She is tasked with making the decisions regarding healthcare and wellbeing of family members (Brown & Johnson, 2008).

### Role of the Elderly and Extended Family

They have a role to care for the children and make sure that they are raised with responsibility and bring honor to the family. The extended family members step in when the parents are away for work and require the assistance to raise their children based on community values (Brown & Johnson, 2008).

## Workforce Issues in Jamaican Culture

The recent increase in the level of literacy around the country has attributed to the shift towards mainstream medical care. This shift to mainstream culture has given the ethically rich Jamaican culture a modern touch. Most households today are becoming more and more thankful for the medical advancements and are open to access when needed. (Beuermann & Garzon, 2016).

## Acculturation of Jamaican Culture

The Jamaican culture is future-oriented. The number of people seeking mainstream healthcare is increasing and is set to further increase when people become more aware of the benefits of the healthcare system and how life-altering it can be. However, healthcare professionals need to concern themselves with becoming better acquainted to the culture at hand and ensure that the people making use of the present system are treated in a manner where there are open to obtaining mainstream healthcare. This cultural competency can be extremely helpful to a healthcare professional, given how diverse the population of the country is becoming with time. It enhances the level of understanding between the healthcare provider and the patients and makes it easier to form a relationship based on mutual trust. Here, cultural competency is capable of encompasses appropriate skills, personality orientation, along with sufficient cultural knowledge.

### Autonomy in Healthcare

The use of modern medicine is more prevalent in the upper class of society, while more Jamaicans prefer religious and holistic forms of treatment to deal with their issues. Over the counter prescriptions, drugs are mostly used to treat illness where holistic treatments aren’t as effective and modern medicine has proven to be more effective. This shows that while the Jamaican culture is protective of its past, at the same time it is open to a modern worldview.

### Barriers in Healthcare

The efforts made by the government to reduce healthcare costs is also a contributive factor on the subject. A number of people seek professional means of healthcare provided by government-run clinics and hospitals. Private clinics are also available, but they are most visited by the upper class of society or those that have insurance covering their healthcare costs (Mordecai & Mordecai, 2001). With the passage of time, more and more Jamaicans are turning to modern healthcare. However, traditional medicine and herbal remedies still remain a go-to source of healthcare.

## Biocultural Ecology of the Jamaican Culture

Jamaicans have a rich culture, especially with regard to their biocultural ecology. It has its nuances and comprises of an inimitable combination of variables that make it stand out. These people have weathered enslavement, oppression and some of the worse traits of human behavior. However, they have persevered and came out stronger on the other side. Thus, one can aptly state that the Jamaican culture inspires pride among its people.

### Biological variations and Genetics

Given the number of sprinters that hail from the area, a deeper look in the biological variation among the people from this culture shows that their anatomy and genetic variation makes them better equipped for it. Firstly, they have a bigger heart, which makes it easier for the organ to pump more amount of blood to the rest of the organs. Furthermore, they also possess the ACE gene which enables them to perform such a feat (Brooks, 2014).

### Skin Color

People belonging to the Jamaican culture are often dark-skinned. However, no matter how beautiful or flawless their skin may be, dark skin is devalued among the masses, which shows their propensity towards skin bleachers in an effort to get lighter skin.

## Nutrition Construct in Jamaican Culture

Jamaica is a melting pot of culture, having been colonized by two very different world powers at one point. Add in the migrational activities, a hybrid of culinary traditions was created in Jamaica as a result. They have incorporated flavors and foods from all around the world, but also incorporate the national fruits and vegetables that are indigenous to the area (Nevius, 2002).

### Meaning of food

Jamaica, as mentioned, is a culture that is deeply integrated into its values and traditions. Jamaicans prefer organic, homegrown foods to this day and prefer that they source their food choices from places that best serves their needs with regard to flavor and nutrition (Higman, 2008).

### Common foods

The most commonly eaten foods in the Jamaican are Ackee and Codfish. Ackee was brought into the area by slaves and eventually became one of the most consumed foods in the area. The same can be said for codfish since it is native to the area, which shows that the Jamaican people prefer native foods that are considered staple foods in the area (Higman, 2008).

### Rituals

The Jamaican people prefer to consume foods in large dishes, considering that people prefer to live in a joint family system rather than nuclear families. Many dishes in large quantities are prepared for a single meal, with the quantity being fit enough to feed the entire family (Higman, 2008).

### Deficiencies and Limitations

Anemia and Iron deficiency are the most prevalent micronutrient deficiencies among the Jamaican population, especially among children. The recorded prevalence can be anywhere between 48% for children aged 1 to 5 years and 24% at the age of 5 to 16 years. Following children, pregnant women in the country are most afflicted with anemia, with the prevalence being as high as 21% on average. This figure varies from parish to parish. While Anaemia and Iron deficiency was considered to be a problem, other problems that are common in most countries across the planet such as Vitamin A deficiency and iodine deficiency were not considered to be a public health problem in Jamaica (FAO, 2010).

On the other hand, while no formal survey has been carried out with regard to the Nutritional status of various age groups within the country. However, according to the Survey of Living Conditions in Jamaica, a 9% increase has been observed among the citizens in the past decade. This has contributed to the intake of high-fat foods and in turn is responsible for the increase in weight and prevalence of obesity among the adult population in Jamaica (FAO, 2010).

### Health Promotion

Initially, considering the extreme living conditions the slave population of Jamaica was subjected to, they were reliant on traditional knowledge and herbal practices in the Country. Many of these approaches and beliefs directly correlated with African religious beliefs. Most folk medicine practitioners were condemned to operate in secret and treat people discreetly for the fear of being ostracized by society. This did more harm than good since people could not rely on medicine since there was no telling if the medicine was good or bad. Add in the harsh conditions made due to slavery that lead to the development of farming communities and the practice of herbal medicine. At present, while Jamaicans still believe in old practices, they have adopted western professional medicine to treat a number of illnesses

## High-Risk Behaviors Construct in Jamaican Culture

In 2013, a national survey of the population aged 15 to 74 years using cluster sampling was carried out for Jamaica Healthy Lifestyle Survey. It showed that most people in Jamaica are having regular blood pressure check, along with a reduction in multiple sexual partners. There has also been a reported increase in condom use among the sexually active female population in the country. Furthermore, while the use of cocaine and marijuana smoking are the biggest health risk behaviors in the country, a reduction in their prevalence has been observed. While a number of positive lifestyle trends were observed lately, most of them still remain common among the Jamaican adults. For this purpose, comprehensive health promotion programs need to be created to address such behaviors (Figueroa, Ward, Walters, Ashley, & Wilks, 2005).

### Tobacco

According to comprehensive health promotion programs in the country, tobacco use is extremely harmful not only to the health of the citizens of Jamaica but also to its treasury and the general spirit of the country. According to a survey, more than 2000 children between the ages of 10 and 14, as well as 275000 adults above the age of 15 years use tobacco every day.

### Alcohol

With around 40% of individuals consuming alcohol every day, alcohol is one of the most widely used drugs in the country, according to the National Council on Drug Abuse (NCDA). According to the most recent Household Drug Survey, about 75% of the population has reported having used alcohol at some point in their lifetime.

### Recreational drugs

At present, the Jamaican law prohibits the use, cultivation, possession and even exchange of recreational drugs. While this particular law is randomly enforced, especially with regard to possession of a recreational drug for personal use, it is still an issue for the law enforcement agencies in the country. The general public realizes the consequences of possessing marijuana and the high costs associated with it, males with a previous criminal record are more at risk for receiving a longer sentence in comparison to first-time offenders or females (Russo & Grotenhermen, 2014).

### Physical activity and Safety

Jamaicans become sexually active at a relatively young age. Especially between the ages of 15-17 years according to a survey by the Reproductive Health Survey. Among the young adult population, 64% of males and 38% of females stated that they were sexually active. The Jamaican society shows most of the classical patterns of mating i.e. socialization, pregnancy, visiting unions, adolescent sexual activity, multiple relationships, common law marriage, casual sex, and legal marriage. The society also shows patterns of homosexuality, prostitution, safer sex practices, and intercourse. This shows that a culture of sex is prevalent among the members of society (Chevnnes, 2012).

## Pregnancy Construct in Jamaican Culture

Jamaican culture believes in giving back to nature. Thus, the umbilical cord of a newborn baby is buried after the birth and a tree is planted on the spot. This tree is called the birth tree. This is seen as a source of pride for children as they grow up. There are a number of other cultural constructs regarding pregnancy in this culture (Kang, 2014).

### Pregnancy Beliefs

There is much belief regarding pregnancy held by the Jamaican culture. Some of them are of mythical nature. For instance, women are recommended to stay away from lizards, needles, and threat. They are asked not to hold their hands above their heads take their picture or even go near the dead. They are asked not to pity the disfigured and stay indoors (Kang, 2014).

### Birthing, Post-partum, and Child rearing

Midwives are still common in the culture, with women using doulas when their child in of the way. The entire family is greatly involved in the rearing of children after their birth and make sure that the mother and the child are both well looked after. The child is raised by the family members and ensure that they comply with their cultural values and traditions (Kang, 2014).

## Death Rituals Construct in Jamaican Culture

Death is regarded as a natural transformation, an intrinsic part of life in the Jamaican culture. In most parts of the word, a traditional wake takes place, followed by a period of mourning. However, in the Jamaican culture, the loved ones of the deceased celebrate the life lived by the deceased for Nine-Night. This ritual is also known as Set-up or Dead Yard. On the last of the nine nights, the people hold a grand celebration with food, music, dancing, white rum and sharing good old stories about the loved one that has just passed away (Huggins & Hinkson, 2017).

### Religious practices and use of prayer

The Jamaican people might be becoming more modern with the time, they are still deeply rooted in tradition. Ritual and ceremonies produced around the death of a loved one show just how dedicated these people are to their faith and religious practices. They pray for the dead and believe in the concept of eternal life, with the souls of the dead remaining among the living.

### Meaning of life

As mentioned, 90% of the population of the country is black. Most of these individuals had slave ancestors. Thus, life holds great meaning for the Jamaican population. This makes the concept of death all the more real for this population. In Jamaica, death was and remains a vital presence.

### Individual strength

In the Jamaican culture, individual strength is derived from family. This is the reason why the death of a child or a young adult is particularly devastating for the family members of the deceased. At a time like this, individual strength is derived from the strength of other family members in an effort to share in one another grief, given that this process can be rather isolating for loved ones.

## Healthcare Practices in Jamaican Culture

The use of modern medicine is more prevalent in the upper class of society, while more Jamaicans prefer religious and holistic forms of treatment to deal with their issues. Over the counter prescriptions, drugs are mostly used to treat illness where holistic treatments aren’t as effective and modern medicine has proven to be more effective. This shows that while the Jamaican culture is protective of its past, at the same time it is open to a modern worldview.

### Focus on health care

A number of people seek professional means of healthcare provided by government-run clinics and hospitals. Private clinics are also available, but they are most visited by the upper class of society or those that have insurance covering their healthcare costs (Mordecai & Mordecai, 2001). With the passage of time, more and more Jamaicans are turning to modern healthcare. However, traditional medicine and herbal remedies still remain a go-to source of healthcare. The recent increase in the level of literacy around the country has attributed to the shift towards mainstream medical care. Most households today are becoming more and more thankful for the medical advancements and are open to access when needed. (Beuermann & Garzon, 2016). The efforts made by the government to reduce healthcare costs is also a contributive factor on the subject.

### Traditional practices and Magico-religious religious beliefs

The Jamaican culture regards health issues and sickness as a punishment for God for sin or wrong-doing. When an individual in the family falls sick, it is a cause for shame and guilt among the members of the family. Furthermore, it is also believed that this punishment will pass on to the next generation. Thus, the Jamaican families prefer to treat illness as a family affair and choose to treat it with herbs, rituals, oils, and baths to anoint the body and purify it from evil and enhance the body’s ability to fight evil. The Jamaican culture firmly believes that supernatural forces are the reason behind good, sickness, evil and ill health. Furthermore, they also choose to self-medicate before seeking professional medical assistance on the matter.

### Responsibility for health

The ministry of health (MOH) is the leading organization that ensures the provision of quality healthcare in Jamaica. This ministry works in collaboration with the Regional Health Authorities (RHAs) and is responsible for the maintenance of the public health system and delivery of healthcare across the country (MOH, 2018).

The primary aim of MOH is to ensure that the people in the country are healthy and live their lives in a healthy environment. It aspires to turn its public healthcare system into one that is client-centered and guarantees access to quality care for the masses. This client-centered form of healthcare aims to take into account the needs of the vulnerable fractions of society and make an assessment of their needs. This way, the system will not only gain information that can help it improve, but it can also educate the population on the subject and facilitate individuals to take responsibility for their own health. This would allow them to make informed decisions and ensure that they can get making healthy lifestyle choices. Additionally, it also ensures the presence of a healthy environment where families and members of the community can come together and actively become part of activities that makes the environment they live in even healthier.

### Transplantation and Rehabilitation

In Jamaica, most surgical specialties are not only represented, but most surgical procedures are offered to the citizens of the country. These include major bowel resections, aortic aneurysmectomy, laparoscopic cholecystectomy, renal transplantation, radical cancer surgery, liver resection, joint replacement, and image-guided neurosurgery. There are more than 4500 elective admissions to surgical specialty healthcare facilities in the country annually, with more than 1100 trauma admissions (Fletcher, McDonald, McCartney, & Carpenter, 2003). These individuals are not only looked after, but their rehabilitation and post-operation wellbeing are also paid due attention. For this reason, the country has a number of rehabilitation centers in place that ensure that the people coming in for surgery are rehabilitated to their pre-hospitalization state as soon as possible.

### Pain/sick role

Health, in the Jamaican culture, is considered to be the absence of illness. As mentioned earlier, illness is seen as a punishment for wrongdoing or sin in this culture, thus the prime role of the person who is sick or in pain to make use of ways to alleviate their condition and get better as soon as possible (Cocks & Møller, 2002). This is because the culture frowns upon sickness and sees it as a cause of shame or guilt.

### Mental health

WHO, in collaboration with MOH, Jamaica aims to improve the mental health system in Jamaica. Their primary aim in this regard is to collect the required information on the mental health system that can be used to improve it. This information will also provide the baseline necessary to ensure that the means of improvement for the situation are being paid due attention to develop a system that is information-based and can provide a clear set of targets with regard to the mental health plans for the country. It will also be helpful at implantation of reforms and such policies that can provide better community services, which involves users, families and other stakeholders in the promotion of mental health, care, prevention and rehabilitation (WHO, 2009).

This system was previously revised in 1997 and has been in place ever since. Another strategic plan was put into place in between the years 2001 and 2006, but both these plans are inadequate to deal with the current issues and barriers being faced by the healthcare facilities in the country. These policies required revision and reformation of various critical components of the system and aim to ensure the critical components of the system, such as human resources and human rights issues are added to the system.

The plans being implemented has divided menta health services into who categories, i.e. national and regional health authorities. This system will integrate mental healthcare into general healthcare, with most regions having access to the essential mental health components. At present, most patients are being treated at the outpatient community facilities. These facilities exist all around the Island and operate as a vital part of primary care. The most prevalent mental disorders in the country are Schizophrenia and Major depressive disorder and the new system seeks to address these issues on a priority basis.

### Barriers

According to a number of studies carried out by Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), it has been observed that the biggest barriers to the provision of optimal care in Jamaican societies stem from inequalities between races, gender, and other socioeconomic groups on the island (PAHO, 2015). This makes greater international and regional cooperation necessary if Jamaica needs to develop its goal of universal health coverage and works towards the attainment of a healthier population. Such cooperation includes better technical support and introduction of the best possible practices from the WHO. This technical support will help with required addition of specialist nurses and health workers to the present system of healthcare.

Additionally, emphasis should also be placed upon removing the financial barriers on health care and ensuring that affordable quality healthcare is provided to the masses at all times.

## Healthcare Practitioners in Jamaican Culture

### Perceptions of practitioners and Folk practitioners

The Jamaican culture, in general, more accepting of natural causes of disability or illness. However, they see illness as a misdiagnosis from a medical professional or the failure of the body to heal itself in the right manner. This fraction is apart from those that usually seek out medical professional to get help and alleviate their suffering in order to find a cure. Here, Obeah or Guzu is the belief that supernatural forces can be the cause of good and evil, health or sickness. Any illness that cannot be explained by medical intervention is considered to be a result of Obeah. This may prompt the use of rituals, herbs, baths and oils for anointing the body. Recitation of biblical scripture may take place as well.

Some Jamaicans may tend to self-medicate before seeking a physician. Spiritual herbalists believe the use of herbs and religious ritual can enhance the body’s ability to fight illness. Elders have a great deal of herbal wisdom and will combine their beliefs with traditional medicine. Herbs are also used for health maintenance. For example, Senna, Epson salt or castor oil is used to cleanse the bowel of worms and purifying the body. A variety of cultural remedies are used to treat illnesses, such as: “bush tea” (herbal remedy) for gastrointestinal disorders, papaya juice for ulcers, hot peppers for hypertension. Those who lack financial resources are forced to use home remedies.

### Gender and health care

In Jamaica, a disparity exists in gender roles of an individual and the associated means of healthcare. These are widely related to sexual and reproductive health programs that have been well-documented in literature. However, much of the work in this area has primarily focused on sexual health, especially in HIV prevention and intimate partner violence, rather than on family planning. In Jamaica alone, the perception of manhood is deeply associated with the concept of having multiple sexual partners and having children with all these partners. This is a common practice in the Jamaican culture with the more than 85% children in the Island are born out of wedlock (Walcott et al., 2014). On the other hand, women suffer from issues like lack of proper nutrition, infection, infertility, chronic diseases, and even stress. Among women, anemia is seen as the biggest reason for infertility among the Jamaican women, while infection usually occurs as a result of sexually transmitted diseases. On the other hand, stress is often the cause of ill health among women, which makes them resort to smoking, alcoholism and even drug abuse to deal with the issues. Governments and organizations need to provide the milieu in which the conditions militating against the health of women will be eliminated.

# Conclusion

Medicine is a homogenous field by nature. It is put in place to serve a truly diverse population which is a major problem in itself. This problem does not limit itself to the language barrier alone. It also encompasses culture and the beliefs this diverse population holds regarding the practice of medicine and their socioeconomic realities which affects their access to said medication. With the country in desperate need for healthcare reforms, it is rather important to redefine the term universal access, especially with regard to the demographic changes in the US in the past few decades. This change accounts for a significant change and the sort that needs to be addressed (Bouye, McCleary, & Williams, 2016). These changing demographics underscore the importance held of cultural diversity, especially with regard to a profession where the relationship between the patient and the provider is key towards determining the quality of care provided. It goes without saying that when a homogenous force of medical professionals is tasked with taking care of a diverse array of patients, the quality of care at hand can greatly suffer as a result (Betancourt, Green, Carrillo, & Owusu Ananeh-Firempong, 2016).

The Jamaican culture is future-oriented. The number of people seeking mainstream healthcare is increasing and is set to further increase when people become more aware of the benefits of the healthcare system and how life-altering it can be. However, healthcare professionals need to concern themselves with becoming better acquainted to the culture at hand and ensure that the people making use of the present system are treated in a manner where there are open to obtaining mainstream healthcare. Thus, healthcare professionals need to become more culturally competent with time and learn to survive in a multicultural environment where they may be subjected to culturally diverse individuals. This cultural competency can be extremely helpful to a healthcare professional, given how diverse the population of the country is becoming with time. It enhances the level of understanding between the healthcare provider and the patients and makes it easier to form a relationship based on mutual trust. Here, cultural competency is capable of encompasses appropriate skills, personality orientation, along with sufficient cultural knowledge.

Health professionals who provide support need to be cognizant of practice differences based on religion, culture, economics, family traditions, and individual preference and provide as much support and resource as possible. This is especially true for culturally rich and diverse cultures, like the Jamaican culture. This makes it the duty of all health professionals to adhere to Purnell’s model of cultural competence and provide care that is centered around the needs of a culture. By embracing this cultural competence and diversity within the profession of mainstream healthcare, care providers will be better equipped with the provision of quality healthcare. It may not seem to have a huge impact at the moment, however, it is capable of improving the present healthcare system is a great way. By giving ethnically diverse individuals a healthcare professional that is one of them allows them to connect with the care professional at a different level and that makes all the difference (Jackson & Gracia, 2014).

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