**Health Risks in Vulnerable Populations**

**Introduction**

The community I will describe in this paper is from The South Bronx. Popularly known as the Southwest Bronx or simply South Bronx, it is in New York. The area extends through the Southern tip of the Borough North up to the 149th street. Some neighborhoods that constitute the South Bronx are Tremont, Highbridge, Soundview, University Heights, Morrisania, Castle Hill and Hunts Point.

The vulnerable population I will focus on is the African American minority population that lives in this area. The aim of this paper is to assess the healthcare needs of this community, by identifying the risks facing the individuals and their families. It will seek to address and shed light on some health problems and risk factors that the African American population faces.

**Vulnerable Population Overview**

The black and African American community is the most dominant of among the 1.2 million inhabitants who live in South Bronx. Majority of them are living below absolute poverty levels. This group is very vulnerable as far as health matter are concerned; 27% of them are uninsured and a third of them even qualify for Medicaid. For this people, meeting even basic needs of food, shelter and clothing is an uphill task because of the extreme poverty they live in. Many of them rely on church donations to get food to eat.

Most of the people from this community that live here are youth and adults. Most of them roam or idle around the streets due to lack of anything else to do and are usually under the influence of alcohol and substances. All day young adults just laze and stand around the streets doing nothing productive. Their grooming is very wanting, with their personal hygiene been very poor. Girls get pregnant at very young age and are often seen strolling on the streets with their babies and young children. The family units seem broken because many young adults are out either in jail or looking for work and leaving their children unsupervised. These children end up engaging in activities like drug-dealing and prostitution from a very early age. Many of these young blacks and African Americans are part of gangs and are involved in gang-activities and gang-violence in the area.

The environment is very dilapidated and dirty. There is garbage strewn all over the streets and the rate of environmental pollution is very high. The buildings are not well-kept with very minimal renovations. Several factors have resulted to these low living standards in this vulnerable population. First, the rate of unemployment in this group is extremely high. Most of the employable ones cite lack of the necessary qualifications to land a job as the reason they are unemployed. Others have not been educated up to the required education levels whereas for some the reason is that they are not well versed with the language spoken for them to get work.

**Community Strengths**

Health care resources for this community are already available. There are several hospitals around which can be used by those that are uninsured and of those relying on Medicaid. The hospitals offer services such as kidney dialysis, HIV/AIDS counseling and treatment, dental services and rehabilitation services. Not far off, there are family planning clinics and other clinics offering child health care services, mental health services, care for senior citizens and generally most common outpatient and inpatient services.

**Community health risks**

The health of this population is put at risk by various factors in their environment. The amount of air and pollution in the area is immense due to heavy industrial traffic. These industries also bring about high rates of waste pollution in the environment. These people are therefore highly susceptible to pollution-triggered diseases like asthma, bronchitis and other related chest problems. The dilapidated states of their apartments further put them at risks of infections and diseases caused by poor hygiene, rodents and polluted water. Having leaking scenes, rats and cockroaches roaming all over, the house is a common scene in houses whose floors and walls have severely peeled (Daniel, 2013). To add onto the risk factors this group is vulnerable to, the number of fast food joints in the area is plenty. Food chains like McDonald, KFC and others offering unhealthy foods in their menu seem to be the most popular food establishments in the area. The people are always struggling with lifestyle diseases and most of the children are overweight because of poor nutrition and feeding habits.

**Community health barriers**

Despite the availability of medical services in the area, many members are not aware of their presence. This is the biggest problem that this vulnerable demographic faces: lack of access to healthcare. Infact, many Medicaid and uninsured patients are not aware that there are hospitals around the area they can use for support. This is very unfortunate because most of the patients only go to the hospital when it’s an emergency and get treated in the ER; at times the disease is too far gone to control which could have been controlled with ease if acted upon earlier.

**Community Health Problem Diagnosis**

One of the biggest health challenges facing the vulnerable population of West Bronx is Asthma. Over time, the number of hospital admissions and fatalities resulting from asthma-related complications has escalated.  The rates in South Bronx are higher than anywhere else in the city, state and country as a whole. Studies attribute this to the significant levels of air pollution in the area.

The Healthy People 2020 has set several objectives as far as asthma is concerned. It is aiming at reducing the hospitalizations and deaths from asthma among both children and adults, reduce emergency department visits for asthma, reduce the proportion of people with asthma who miss work or school due to the disease and lastly, to increase the proportion of persons with current asthma who receive appropriate asthma care according to National Asthma Education and Prevention Program (NAEPP) guidelines (Social, 2014).

**Summary**

The connection between exposure to a hazardous environment and unfavorable health outcomes cannot be overlooked. Unfortunately, most marginalized and minority groups like blacks and African Americans mentioned above are the ones who are most vulnerable to these environments. The existence of pollutants and toxic facilities continue to be a threat to good health and quality of life in these communities. These communities, despite their circumstances, have a collective responsibility to come together and create awareness in their communities on the health risks they are facing, ways of prevention and treatment and speak out against any institutions that are taking advantage of their situation e.g. industries that continue to pollute their surroundings with impunity (REACH, 2016). The government should also play a major supportive role in providing health care services and increasing access to health care for these communities as well as implementing health and environmental policies that protect them from uncalled for health hazards.

**References**

Daniel P.  (2013). Health Disparities and Environmental Justice in the Bronx. Retrieved from:<https://theejbm.wordpress.com/2015/03/23/health-disparities-and-environmental-justice-in-the-bronx/>

REACH (2016). Finding Solutions to Health Disparities at a Glance. *Centre for Disease Control and Prevention*, 11(29), 23-9.

Social determinants of health (2014).  Retrieved from: <http://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topicsobjectives2020/overview.aspx?topicida=39>