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MEDICINE

Penn State Public Health professor to present research on discrimination and health care at national conference

Experiences of discrimination and the resultant stressors associated can ultimately manifest as physical conditions.

HERSHEY, PA — Dr. Yendelela Cuffee, an assistant professor of Public Health Sciences at the Penn State College of Medicine, will present a poster this evening on how discrimination may impact the health and well-being of women of color at a national conference in March. The presentation — *Examining Self-Reported Discrimination, Beliefs about Health Care, and Emotional Well-being among African-American Women* — is part of the Society of Behavioral Medicine's (SBM) 40th Annual Meeting and Scientific Sessions in Washington, D.C.

Dr. Cuffee's research examines how experiences of discrimination might trigger physiological responses and resultant stressors can manifest themselves into physical conditions. The findings examine more than 550 African-American women living with hypertension in Birmingham, Ala., to see how self-reported experiences of race and gender-based discrimination are associated with emotional well-being and beliefs about health care.

Results show that intersectionality and the combined effects of race and gender-based discrimination negatively affect participants' mental health, particularly in regards to happiness and trust. Those who reported discrimination experienced more negative mental health outcomes, specifically anxiety and depression. Meanwhile, individuals with no reported incidents of discrimination generally were happier, more trusting, and healthier.

"To my knowledge, this is one of the first studies to examine both race and gender-based discrimination, and the impact on both physical and mental health," said Dr. Cuffee. "Our findings suggest that women of color — who experienced discrimination in health care and beyond — are less trusting and that these factors might influence, not only how they access medical care, but also individuals' relationships with health care providers," she adds.

"Dr. Cuffee's work has made important strides in understanding how discrimination shapes public health. While research suggests that it is difficult to untangle this complex dynamic, it is important to continue examining these intersectional ties, not only among African American

women but for other minority groups as well,” said Vernon M. Chinchilli, PhD, Distinguished Professor and Chair of the Department of Public Health Sciences at the College of Medicine.

The research will be presented during the multidisciplinary behavioral medicine conference in the nation’s capital on March 6-9. Dr. Cuffee’s co-authors include Drs. Portia Jackson Preston, an assistant professor at California State University in Los Angeles, and Jeroan Allison, a professor at the University of Massachusetts Medical School.

About Penn State Public Health Sciences

As a leader in research, education, and outreach, the Penn State Department of Public Health Sciences has impacted national clinical, regulatory, and public health decision-making. The department offers an array of public health-related graduate degrees and certificate programs. For more information about the program, visit med.psu.edu/phs.

Conference Program

<https://www.sbm.org/UserFiles/file/am19-pro-v11.pdf>

About SBM

The SBM is a 2,400-member organization of scientific researchers, clinicians and educators. They study interactions among behavior, biology and the environment, and translate findings into interventions that improve the health and well-being of individuals, families and communities. For more information, visit www.sbm.org.