

TODAY'S CHICAGO WOMAN

DECEMBER 1999

"YUPPIE FLU" NOT TRUE

IF YOU THINK Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS), better known as the "yuppie flu," is largely a figment of an overworked middle-class, middle-aged female imagination, think again. A recent ground breaking study explodes this popular myth.

Leonard Jason, DePaul University professor of psychology, headed the study. An expert on CFS, he's also the author of 12 books and more than 300 scholarly articles on chronic fatigue syndrome, which affects 422 of every 100,000 Americans. The rate is twice as high as previously reported by the Centers for Disease Control, which means that as many as 800,000 people nationwide may suffer from CFS.

Jason reports that there's a greater prevalence of CFS among African Americans and Latinos than white women. CFS among women was much higher than men, with 522 afflicted out of every 100,000 compared to 291 men for every 100,000. The prevalence rate for women is higher than it is for AIDS, breast and lung cancer. "When comparing the prevalence of CFS in women to the prevalence of other diseases, CFS emerges as a serious women's concern," affirms Jason.

CFS is a chronic condition with symptoms that are severe but often difficult to detect. They include debilitating fatigue, headaches and unrefreshing sleep. For years the condition went undiagnosed because physicians couldn't distinguish between common fatigue and CFS.

The study also found that individuals with CFS were more likely to have lower levels of education and occupational status.

According to the study, more than 90% of those sampled were previously undiagnosed. "This indicates that there are many people in the general population who are not currently diagnosed. Many CFS individuals lack access to health care so they end out dropping out of the medical system," explains Jason.

In the study, Latinos demonstrated the highest prevalence at 726 for every 100,000 versus 310 for every 100,000 whites. African Americans account for 337 out of 100,000.

Jason indicates that the level of elevated CFS rates in Latinos and African Americans may be due to poor health status and may include psychological and social stress, behavioral risk factors, poor nutrition and more hazardous occupations. ■