

VITAMINS

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome Not Just a "Whites Only" Disease

Because of the perception that persons suffering from Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS) are largely white, affluent women who don't really have a serious malady, the condition has been dismissed in some circles as "Yuppie flu." But now, a ground-breaking new study explodes this myth by revealing that some minority populations are far more likely to be afflicted by CFS than whites.

According to the community-based study led by Leonard Jason, Ph.D., a professor of psychology at DePaul University in Chicago, CFS is actually more prevalent among Latinos and African Americans, respectively, than whites (see graph). The study—based on a sampling of 28,673 adults in ethnically diverse Chicago communities—also confirms that CFS is considerably more common in women than in men. The surprisingly high prevalence of CFS in Latinos, blacks and women is especially dramatic because it is twice as high as rates previously reported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Jason believes there are several reasons why CFS has been so seriously underreported in minority populations. "Studies that relied on referrals from physicians and medical clinics have underestimated prevalence because many low-income individuals lack access to health care and many patients with fatigue drop out of the medical care system," he explains. He adds that more than 90% of those sampled in his study who were found to have CFS were previously undiagnosed.

In addition, Jason cites the importance of other factors that can contribute to poor health status among underserved ethnic groups, such as psychological and social stress, behavioral risk factors, poor nutrition, inadequate health care, hazardous occupations and environmental exposures.

CFS, also known as Chronic Fatigue and Immune Dysfunction Syndrome (CFIDS), is a complex, debilitating chronic illness with symptoms that are often difficult to detect in physical examinations. They include severe fatigue that significantly reduces the patient's ability to perform usual activities, headaches and unrefreshing sleep.

Reprints of the study are available from DePaul's Media Relations Office at (312) 362-8623, or it can be downloaded from www.fatigue.med.deu.edu. For general information about CFS, contact the American Association for Chronic Fatigue Syndrome at (206) 521-1932 or the CFIDS Association of America at (800) 442-3437.

Of particular concern to minority nurses is an earlier study, also led by Jason, which found that health care professionals—especially nurses—are at a higher-than-average risk of developing CFS. Watch for more information about nurses and CFS in an upcoming issue of *Minority Nurse*.

Cases of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome Per 100,000 U.S. Population

