



# Social Contexts of Health Research Lab

Department of Psychology  
University of Maryland, Baltimore County

## Psychosocial Contexts of Sickle Cell Disease

The term “sickle cell disease” (SCD) refers to a group of genetic blood disorders that impact over 250 million people worldwide. Individuals with SCD often experience several acute and chronic health problems, but the most commonly reported complication is severe, unpredictable pain. Research suggests that SCD pain is not *solely* a physiological phenomenon: both *stress* and *mood* have been shown to predict the frequency and intensity of SCD episodes. However, the majority of SCD research studies almost exclusively emphasize biomedical aspects of the

condition. Only in the past fifteen years has serious attention been given to social and psychological factors that might contribute to the SCD experience. This increased emphasis on psychosocial contexts is very important, given that the sickle cell population in the United States is no longer primarily comprised of children and adolescents, but also includes a significant proportion of adults over the age of 30. Our research team is one of the few in the nation dedicated to better understanding the ways in which a broad range of social and psychological factors shape adult adaptation and adjustment to SCD.



Our principal objective is to produce a body of rigorous scientific research that can inform novel and innovative interventions for enhancing the quality of life of adults with SCD.



### Current Research Projects:

Racial Identity and Psychological Adjustment to SCD

Respect, Trust, and Pain Management in SCD

Employment Status and SCD Outcomes

Health Behaviors of D.C. Ward 7 Residents

Perceived Stigma and Mental Health in SCD

Stress, Community Problems, and Urban Health

Social Perceptions of SCD

## Cultural Identity and Community Health

Research studies show a relationship between positive cultural identity and mental health outcomes. However, few studies have examined the relationship between cultural identity and health, especially in urban communities. Our research team works closely with academics, activists, and community-

based organizations in Washington, DC and Baltimore to study how cultural identity *and* environmental factors interact to influence health care use, physical activity, and dietary behavior. Our goal in this line of research is to use *emic*, or within-group approaches, to facilitate culturally appropriate in-

terventions that are more consonant with national goals of promoting health and reducing disparities among ethnic and cultural groups. By doing so, we gain a clearer understanding of health behavior as it occurs in community contexts.

For application materials and general information about the HSP Program, please visit:

<http://www.umbc.edu/psyc/grad/hsp.html>



### Lab Director

Dr. Shawn M. Bediako, assistant professor of psychology, established the Social Contexts of Health Research Lab at UMBC in Fall 2005. He earned an M.S. in community psychology from Florida A&M University, a Ph.D. in social/health psychology from Stony Brook University, and completed postdoctoral studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. A recognized expert in cultural identity and health, Dr. Bediako is strongly committed to training and mentoring the next generation of community health researchers. He can be reached via email at [bediako@umbc.edu](mailto:bediako@umbc.edu).

### About the Program...

The Human Services Psychology Ph.D. program at UMBC is designed to prepare students to promote human well-being through the acquisition and application of psychological knowledge and principles. The program has an integrative conceptual structure that encompasses three specialty programs in **CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY**, **BEHAVIORAL MEDICINE**, and **COMMUNITY & APPLIED SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY**. Students may pursue either of these programs independently; however, many choose to combine areas of focus—depending on their interests and career goals. In addition to well-equipped laboratories, the department is able to draw upon the rich research and applied clinical training resources found in the Baltimore-Washington corridor. Graduates of our program are currently employed in various capacities, including academic institutions, state and federal government, community mental health organizations, and medical centers.

### Information For Prospective Candidates...

The Social Contexts of Health Research Lab at UMBC is committed to training scholar/activists for research and service in the public sector, placing special emphasis on the problems of urban and under-served populations. We are specifically recruiting outstanding individuals for the doctoral program in Human Services Psychology who have interests in examining community health issues from a broad social science perspective.

#### Prospective candidates should:

- Have earned at least a bachelor's degree in a social/health science discipline with a minimum 3.2 grade point average
- Have competitive GRE scores
- Have experience working with underserved populations
- Have clearly identified research interests that fit into one (or more) of our specialty programs

#### Current Collaborators:

- Sickle Cell Center for Adults at Johns Hopkins
- Welch Center for Prevention Epidemiology, & Clinical Research
- People Before Profit Community Healthcare Project
- Brent Sickle Cell & Thalassemia Centre (London)
- Bahian Association for Sickle Cell Disease (Brazil)
- Citizens for Quality Sickle Cell Care