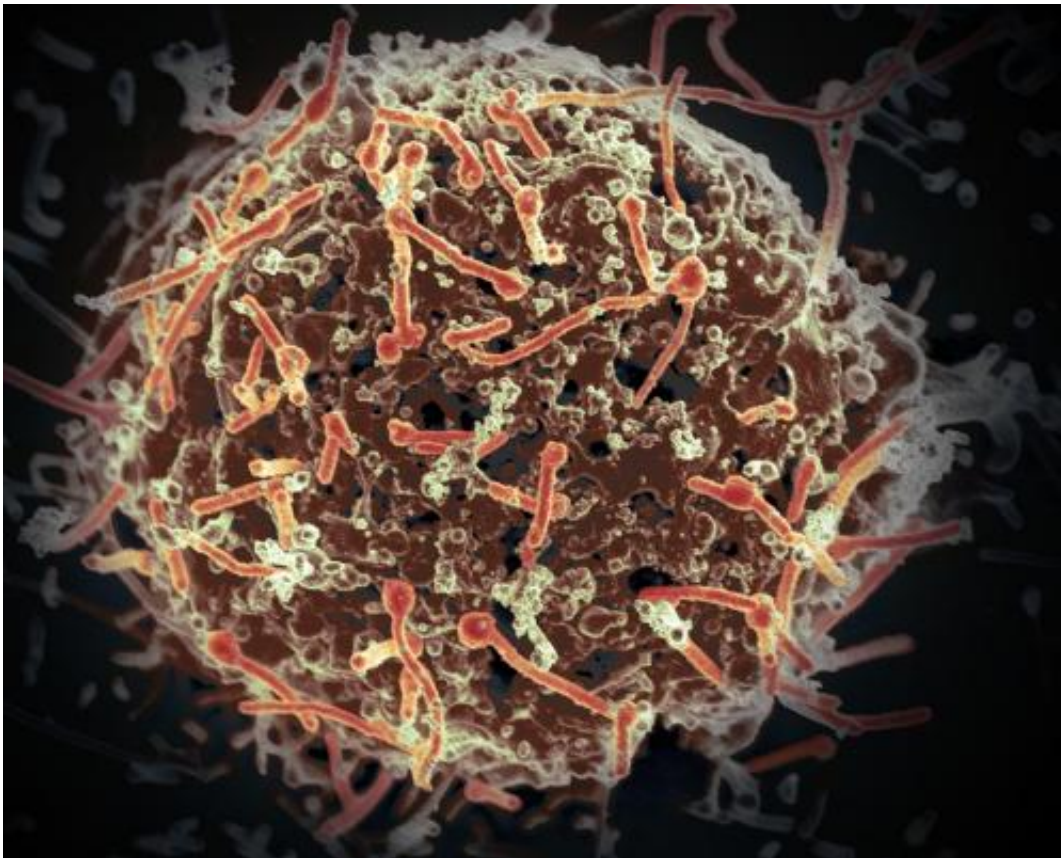


How the Ebola scare stigmatized African immigrants in the US

November 2 2015, by Dawn Fuller



The Ebola virus, isolated in November 2014 from patient blood samples obtained in Mali. The virus was isolated on Vero cells in a BSL-4 suite at Rocky Mountain Laboratories. Credit: NIAID

The deadly Ebola virus outbreak in West Africa also took its toll socially on one of the fastest growing populations in the United States, African

immigrants. Guy-Lucien Whembolua, a University of Cincinnati assistant professor of Africana studies, leads an analysis of national news coverage of the Ebola scare in a poster presentation on Nov. 2, at the 143rd American Public Health Association (APHA) Annual Meeting and Expo, in Chicago.

The examination reviewed reports in mainstream U.S. media related to African [immigrants](#) and the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD). The search turned up 21 news articles that matched the criteria for the study - articles focusing on African immigrants in the U.S. and the Ebola [virus](#).

The researchers found that these African immigrants experienced stigma similar to communities stigmatized by the AIDS epidemic in the '80s. "There was strong discrimination against homosexual men during the AIDS epidemic and laying blame on that population for the spread of the virus," says Whembolua. "Similarly, in the early stages of the Ebola Virus outbreak in West Africa and amid sensationalized reports, we found a fear linked with African immigrants around spreading the disease in the U.S. Some of these populations felt they had to hide their ethnicity in an effort to avoid the stigma."

As a result, Whembolua says particularly in New York where there's a high Liberian immigrant population, there was a great deal of shame in being associated with Liberia. "Children were teased in high school, or adults were the butt of jokes at work. People from Nigeria also were stigmatized by the Ebola scare, resulting in stress and hardships for these populations," says Whembolua.

The researchers add that understanding this stigma faced by African communities in the U.S. could help improve health promotion programs targeting immigrants. They emphasize that the outbreak highlights a need for research on infectious disease that's relatively unknown in the U.S. and the Western world.

"There's more to the high death rate from the Ebola Virus in West Africa than just the virus itself," says Whembolua. "These countries don't have the infrastructures to combat the virus, and most of the populations affected already have low immune systems as the result of living in an impoverished country."

A Pew Research Center analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data, reported last spring, found that the black immigrant [population](#) in the U.S. is more than four times the number it was in 1980, and rapid growth is expected to continue.

Future UC research involving focus groups with populations stigmatized by the Ebola scare is currently under development in collaboration with Binghamton University.

More information: www.apha.org/events-and-meetings/annual

Provided by University of Cincinnati

Citation: How the Ebola scare stigmatized African immigrants in the US (2015, November 2) retrieved 25 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-11-ebola-stigmatized-african-immigrants.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--