NARRATIVES ON MENTAL HEALTH AMONG HAITIAN MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES IN CHILE

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to analyze the mental and psychosomatic health of a small sample of Haitian migrants in Santiago de Chile. It discusses some of the factors that indirectly affect their subjective experience and psychological balance, such as, a migration governance model based on state control and security, the precariousness of their living conditions, as well as, the discrimination and racism they suffer. This qualitative, exploratory study is based mainly, on semi-structured interviews with Haitian migrants whose narratives are analyzed for content. Psychosomatic risks have proved to include previous traumatic situations and those underlying the decision to migrate. Unfinished grieving processes, related to the loss of family ties, religion, culture and language are also influence mental disequilibrium. However, their strength and self-pride about Haitian history, ethics, and culture – often ignored by Chileans- act as sources of psychosomatic protection and resilience.

Keywords: Mental health; Haitian migrants; governance; racism; discrimination.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In 2010, almost 10 % of Haitian individuals lived outside their country of origin, largely induced by the earthquake of 2010 and the subsequent cholera epidemic (Brutus & Chalmers, 2010). From then on, the migration pattern changed from one where migration to Northern countries predominated to an interregional migration directed almost exclusively to the Dominican Republic (Nieto, 2014), and from then on, towards other countries in the region (IOM, 2017). In 2015, three quarters of migrants residing in Chile came from South American countries (IOM, 2016). Foreign population increased significantly by December 2019, reaching 7.8% of the total population with the predominance of Venezuelans (30. 5%), Peruvians (15.8 %) and Haitians (12.5 %) (SJM, 2020). Between 2010 and 2015, Haitians grew from representing 0.4 % of the total of foreigners to being the third largest group of migrants (12.5 %) in 2019 (SJM, 2020).

If the general trend towards the feminization of South-South migration in the Region were considered, this is instead a masculine flow, with an estimated three-quarters of Haitian migrants being men and, with a growing impact of women due to family reunification. In

general, it is a population with previous experience of territorial mobility in their work and life trajectories and considers settlement in Chile only as transitory (Valenzuela et al., 2014)

An important part of this population is very vulnerable and faces strong sociocultural exclusion in Chile due to the transversal experience of racism (Rojas Pedemonte et al., 2015).There is plenty of evidence that it has suffered exploitation, discrimination and racism at the job level (Bustamante, 2017; Rojas & Koechlin, 2017), sexualization towards women (Valenzuela et al., 2018) (but also men), very precarious and overcrowded living arrangements (Bonhomme, 2021), an underestimation and lack of recognition of their educational qualifications and training (SJM, 2020), discrimination towards children and adolescents in educational institutions (Pavez et al., 2019) and a higher level of multidimensional poverty than nationals and other migrant collectives (DEM, 2017). They have faced challenges different to other migrant nationalities, partly due to the distance from their country of origin, their different language and the colour of their skin.

2.0 AIMS

The main aim of this article is to analyse the mental health and psychosomatic conditions of a small sample of Haitian nationals living in Chile, focusing upon their living environment, the public policies on governance oriented towards them and the discrimination, racism and xenophobia they face socially and officially. For this purpose, the present article sets out to explore the following interrelated questions:

- What are the main factors that influence mental health, stress and psychological wellbeing among Haitians living in Chile?
- How do Haitians themselves interpret these factors in their narratives?

3.0 CONSIDERATIONS ON THEORY AND METHOD

Many interconnected factors affect the mental health of migrants and refugees, among them: the socioeconomic, political and survival conditions experienced before migration, the process of migration itself, the level of material and emotional welcoming found upon arrival, their access to legal documentation, their possibility of social, economic and cultural integration into the country of settlement, the specific public policies designed to protect them, the country´s open recognition of their rights, the quality of new and former interpersonal relationships established, their capacity to mourn numerous losses, their level of collective organization, the intrapsychic equilibrium of individuals and lastly, though not least, the daily level of discrimination or racism faced by them. The last has been proven to be a key social determinant of psychosomatic stress and ill mental health. (Mera-Lemp, M. J., et al., 2020; Urzúa et al., 2020; Oyarte et al., 2022).

At another level, the form of migration governance plays an important role in the management and control of the displacement of people (Mármora, 2003; Domenech, 2018). The Chilean state has adopted this approach, being its first clear manifestation in 2008, during the Presidency of Michelle Bachelet (2010-2016), through the Presidential Instructive N 009, 2008. The instructive linked migration governance with protection to migrants, on the one hand, and on the other, to the society, for the risks some migrants may cause. Security and

regulation tend to be emphasized over rights (Acero & Zuleta Pastor, 2024). Migrant hierarchies appear as traits of the migrants themselves, but these hierarchies are a construction of the state itself, embedded in its existing policies, their vacuums and lacks (Mezzadra, 2012).

Collins (2008) develops the notion of the matrix of domination that differentiates four main domains: the structural one, that establishes the parameters of power; the disciplinary one, where bureaucracies articulate routines, rationalizations and vigilance; the hegemonic domain that includes the narratives that legitimize oppression and the interpersonal one, i.e. everyday life relationships. In the last, resistance and agency are of a subjective and inter-subjective nature and can be expressed as willpower, desire, self-determination and awareness from the emotional level. Inter-subjectivity allows for the development of a collective awareness among the marginalized and the creation of alliances between oppressed groups and individuals. Racism, discrimination and xenophobia are crucial factors within this domination matrix.

In this sense, racism is the base for rejection and discrimination and justifies contempt, exploitation and even extermination of those races considered as inferior (Rojas Pedemonte, et al., 2015). However, in modern societies, racism has often adapted to general anti-racist awareness, substituting racist categories for cultural determinism. Racism can manifest itself simultaneously, at least, at three different levels: structural racism involving institutions; the interpersonal level where discrimination is at stake and at the subjective level where it operates as internalized racism (Jones, 2000). Structural racism is embodied in norms and policies that provide a differential access to goods, social services and power. These restrictions have been clearly directed at Haitians in Chile. In interpersonal discrimination, prejudices on the qualities, capacities, intentions and value of people are defined according to their phenotype and lead to discriminatory active behaviour or omissions, e.g. police abuse, hatred, distrust in the Other´s capacities and so on. Internalized racism is the acceptance within the racialized groups of the value of the racist attitudes experienced towards them - usually manifested as impotence or self-depreciation (Jones, 2021).

In summary, the theoretical aspects informing our case-study´s analysis on Haitian migrants and refugees in Chile, include the precariousness of their past and present living conditions, their insertion into a society that uses a national migration governance model based upon management and control and the role of racism and discrimination as factors that cause psychosomatic disequilibrium and often demotivate open collective resistance.

4.0 METHOD

Methodologically, this is an exploratory, qualitative study of a hypothetic deductive nature, based upon specialized literature on Haitian history, culture, migration and refuge; on information collected at the websites of government agencies, as well as, of key civic society associations that work in favour of these populations. Online press information has also been selectively analysed. The core of the technique adopted for data-collection was the development of 10 semi-structured face-to-face interviews, of one and a half to two hours duration, with Haitian migrants and representatives of collectives in the Metropolitan Area of Santiago de Chile. The ten interviewees were equally divided by gender; they represent different age-cohorts and salary quintiles. The answers were anonymized for reasons of confidentiality, recorded and transcribed. The topics covered by these interviews exceed the

issue of mental and psychosomatic health and also describe the Haitian migrants´/refugees´ socioeconomic and emotional situation prior to the journey, during it and in settlement.

Content analysis was applied to the interviewees´ narratives, considering statements that are often recurrent in the narratives (Castro, 2004). The topics explored are centred around the main following criteria that intervene on health and mental health: wellbeing in country of origin, intrapsychic personality traits, traumatic or difficult events during the journey, quality of emotional reception in initial and subsequent resettlement, support networks, access to health and mental health services, effects of policy governance, degrees of stress, main losses mourned, discrimination experiences and forms of resistance, collective organization, as well as physical and mental severe and minor symptoms.

4.1 Characteristics of the interviewees

Most of the interviewees arrived in the early wave of migration towards Chile and often, at the time of the Haitian earthquake of 2010 -or a few years later-, and the subsequent cholera epidemic, that made survival in their country of origin extremely difficult. The migrants interviewed mostly belong to the age-cohort prevalent among Haitians that have migrated to Chile, i.e. that one between 25 and 39 years old. They usually self-define themselves as black or Afro-black and as practitioners of Evangelism.

These interviewees often have in Chile a formal job with a contract – a requirement for visa approval- but they also try out different second independent jobs, for which they were either trained in Haiti or in Chile. There tends to be a gap between their past training and what they were used to work at professionally in Haiti versus the jobs they perform nowadays. Many have had to quit their studies or their careers in order to migrate and, in Chile, they have only found employment in lower qualified jobs. For example, an interviewee working as a saleswoman in Haiti has become an in-door domestic worker and a French and English teacher has turned into an attendant at a fast-food shop.

5.0 RESULTS AND FINDINGS

5.1 The Haitian context in Chile

Haiti is a reference in the region for its struggle for independence from the colonies carried out throughout the XVII to the XIX centuries and obtained in 1804 and as a rebel to the components that sustained slavery (Rojas Pedemonte, et al., 2015). Haiti experienced a prolonged period of political instability and the rise of extreme poverty, till the 2010 earthquake and subsequent cholera crisis that led together to an amount of 300,000 deaths (Nieto, 2014; IMO, 2017).

Haitians arrive in Chile directly at the International Airport, which results in a low percentage of clandestine entry and migration irregularity. The rate of refugee visa is almost null.

These migrants tend to be segregated and concentrated in low-income, peripheral neighbourhoods. This spatial distribution results in scarce access to quality public services and high exposure to everyday insecurity. They tend to work in salaried jobs with longer working hours than the legal standard and perform unqualified work. Male employment is frequent in construction, car-washing centres, gas stations, small workshops and wineries, and in the case

of women, in cleaning and sale jobs; which in general are all easy to find. They are favoured by their regular kind of visas and the positive value attached to their work by Chilean employers who consider them more responsible and disciplined than other South American migrants (Solimano et al., 2012).

To counteract the massive arrival of Haitians, and also related to a social imaginary based on race discrimination, the Chilean State designed specific restrictive policies for this nationality of migrants. During the Presidency of Sebastián Piñera (2010-2014), an informal letter of invitation and a thousand dollars were requested for their entry into Chile (Rojas & Koechlin, 2017). Later on, other restrictive measures were designed under the appearance or pretext of a 'humanitarian type of action', though they actually were subtle ways of expulsion. Stang et al., (2020)- on which this section of the paper is largely based- consider these policies as 'rhetoric humanitarian measures' or 'politics of control with a human face' (Domenech, 2013). The three main legal measures applied solely to Haitian migrants refugees have been: the establishment of a Simple Tourist Consular Visa of entrance to the country, a Humanitarian Family Reunification Visa, and the implementation of a "Humanitarian Plan of Orderly Return to their Country of Origin for Foreign Citizens".

The last measure, which is more extreme, in principle was directed to all regular and irregular foreigners and refugees that wanted to return to their own country individually or as a family. However, it was mainly applied to Haitians. But those included in this Plan, could not return to Chile for a period of 9 years. This sole aspect plus Haitians´ living precariousness in Chile questions the extent to which the Plan was really voluntary. The Plan could be considered as an indirect, selective and discriminatory measure of expulsion or deportation, as has been argued by Haitian migrant collectives (Muñoz Ruiz, 2014).

As a result of these restrictions, in 2019, there was a high rejection of visa applications by the Chilean Consulate in Haiti, with 193 visas approved out of 2 254 (Bellolio & Valdes, 2020). Haitians entry to Chile shows a continuous descent from 110 166 in 2017 to 39 263 in 2018 and, 7 515 in 2019. Moreover, the number of Haitians that left Chile in 2019 surpassed that of those that entered (SJM, 2020).

5.2 Traumatic situations, mourning and stress in the migration process

In this section, the different aspects that influence Haitian migrants´ health and mental health in Chile are reported, either using their own narratives, or including a reflection on socioeconomic and life quality conditions that might be indirectly affecting their wellbeing.

All interviewees narrate the profound state of insecurity they were living in before migration. They report difficulties to survive and many had experienced famine. A few also refer to their mental disequilibrium at home: "At the time of the earthquake I was studying medicine, I had just got in but after the earthquake I had a severe depression, my mother sent me to study another course but it did not work out because I did not like it" (M4).

A female research participant describes herself as a victim of human trafficking when accepting an invitation to Ecuador, under the false pretext of training as a medical doctor. This is one of the worst traumatic events found in our sample. Other critical events had to be faced in Haiti during and after the earthquake and the cholera epidemic: "One was desperate because there

were so many dead people, the earthquake had happened in January, the country was falling down, the economic situation, health, all was collapsed, there were a lot of sick people with diseases that appeared due to the number of dead in the streets, there were too many dead" (M2).

The everyday life violence lived is also described: "In Haiti, first it is taken away from you, perhaps they kill you for something that is not worthwhile (…) Delinquencies, killings, no development, no true politician that talks to the people" (M2). A woman says: "One is in fear everyday of being abducted, it happens daily, this frustrates you and you are in constant stress" (W1).

By contrast, these Haitians praise the security and economic stability they have either expected or found in Chile: "Unemployment rates in Argentina and Venezuela were very high and in Chile, very low. Then I said to myself, at some point, if I work in Chile I can study again. I came to Chile with a backpack full of dreams and a heart full of hope." (M4).

Some tend to think Chileans do not appreciate enough what they have built. A female interview says: "I see a lot of social protests, people are angry and I say to myself, look at all you have, you complain about everything you do not value all you have because if there was a bit of Chile in my country, I would not be here, I would be in my country and with my family." (W2)

One man mentions the corruption existing in Haiti, for example, at Church. Having formerly been an Evangelic preacher in Haiti, he describes this situation as: "Only listen to the beautiful words and give a percentage of what one earns, you see" (M1). In a similar direction, a man argues: "We are used to live with very few resources, Chileans always want more, they are always literally harassed by consumer credits, those things, as persons they always feel that pressure on them" (M3).

Others mention the economic situation and the need to advance in life, with a lot of accent placed upon the possibility of working and studying at the same time and, most especially, if they have children. Narratives are based upon Haitian ethics, discipline, honesty and religiosity. The value they assign to work and family, where men are seen as main providers, has a certain similarity with the conservative neoliberal matrix of contemporary Chile.

All the interviews refer, at some point, to their difficulties in saying good-bye to their parents and closer relatives. Nostalgia and preoccupation on these subject runs throughout the interviews, as a key emotional symptom.

Grief also relates to the things that they usually did in their country and had to be left aside: "I normally every Sunday cooked at home, I got married, I lived in another house and also in my parents´ house. I took them food all the time. After work, I always went to visit my parents. That is why I miss them so much, I have a tremendous attachment to them." (W3). The lack of mourning of this type of loss is clearly represented in this quotation, with nostalgia and melancholy being its main consequences. Often, they try to overcome it, developing a resilient strategy that involves avoiding too much contact with their relatives: "I talk very little [with my mother], punctual things, because if not I become melancholic" (M5). As a vision that diverges from this general approach, one woman celebrates the greater independence she has accomplished in Chile, following the gender values embodied in the national culture (W4).

She states that women in Haiti are negatively controlled by their families of origin in a patriarchal sense and that they hardly let them go out.

They also miss other things from their country of origin: "this taste of people being happy, I feel the Haitian people are happy people. I think Chile had a ranking as one of the sadder populations in the world. I miss that, the happiness […] It is important to be joyful, I trust this, I firmly believe that people´s behaviour and mental health can make a real and visible change in society and also especially in how we see others" (M 4).

Another life facilitator at arrival, was that they were usually received by already settled family members, friends, Chileans they met abroad or online, other Haitians already living in Chile or more distant relatives who usually provided them with lodging at their homes for the first weeks or months, until they could settle independently. Haitians value, more than space and comfort, the possibility of being in contact with other Haitians who can help them in different ways during that initial period of settlement.

Finding a job for mere survival does not seem traumatic, as they are usually already working a few days after arrival. However, racial discrimination acts at this level. One participant argues about getting a job: "Yes, Yes, it is difficult because when they see in your curriculum that you are Haitian, they say no, this one is a "problematic situation" (un cacho) (…) so why risk myself? (…) they disqualify you and punish you for being a black Haitian and not a Spanish speaker, if they see your picture, it is the last straw. (…) (M4)". Schools have started convoking Haitians as facilitators to mediate between professors and students, but solely on a voluntary basis.

However, the working conditions for mere survival are precarious and usually do not respond to their previous training or acquired capacities. For example, a qualified graduate from University says: "the first job I worked at was in civil construction for two years, then at an internet cafe, afterwards at FONASA Integra (the public health system) as a secretary and as a sales analyst, while I continued studying" (M4).

There are a number of criticisms among the interviewees about the role played by state protection and about social inequalities and injustices within Chilean society. They also emphasize that the migration law and/ or norms have changed many times and become more restrictive lately. In the first wave of migration, Haitians were allowed to change their tourist visa- if they had arrived as such -when they were already in Chile. Later on, during the government of President Piñera, a male interviewee describes, "one had to have economic support from one sole employer for two years, which I consider a form of slavery, because it ties you to just one person. Even if one disliked the work situation, one had to endure it because one´s visa and future depended upon this" (M1)

Being able to access adequate legal documentation, as well as the handling of Spanish, as a new language, are matters of great stress and worry and also involve the impossibility of continuing their studies, given that they are illegally subjected to very long working hours. Many educational institutions also demand a permanent visa for admission (W1).

A male interviewee narrates his experience: "I had a bad experience with my first employer. I resigned to maintain my mental health. He denounced me for ending the contract and then I

could not have another visa till another employer gave me a contract; but I waited four years to get a new temporary visa, even being a professional and having Chilean children. Also, nowadays the government is asking for a criminal record certificate of the last five years in your country of origin, instead of the country of residence. And this is very difficult to get in Haiti, due to the situation it is going through" (M4). The stress is high as the same norm does not apply to everybody; registration largely depends on what administrative staff takes on your case.

A man clearly states how he is disgusted by the impossibility of studying without a permanent residence, as well as with the change of professional and student status they had in Haiti, another type of grief often interviewees mourn. "Suddenly, I feel a strong anger, Why did this happen to me? I was a very intelligent student in my country; […] so arriving here, I wanted to advance but it is as if I am going backwards" (M1). This seems both a very sad and enraging feeling.

Interviewees also miss other activities, usually the religious one. They often have not resorted to this possibility in Chile, either due to lack of time or because they dislike local ceremonies, "the manner in which we worship at Church, it is more joyful when we adore and praise God, all that: music, blows, singing, dancing, hi-fiving" (M4).

Only one male interviewee mentions the importance he attaches to vodou practices, that he defines not only as a religion but also as a culturally-oriented activity. However, informal statements show that vodou has a greater importance in their lives than that they acknowledge openly. Vodou´s West African roots come from the ancient practices of ancestor worship and animism, which incorporate the belief that spirits inhabit all things, including animals and plants. It uses African knowledge of herbs and charms, as well as European elements of Catholicism (McGee, 2012; Desrosiers & Fleurose, 2002). This male interview argues: "Vodou is the practice practised by the founding fathers to liberate the country from slavery: ceremonies, lighting candles of different type of colours, you know…These are ceremonies to obtain liberation. Liberation! To generate freedom. However, people imagine it in another way" (M4). In this narrative, the interviewee defines and legitimizes vodou practices as a central part of his culture, indirectly showing that, as they are not understood and badly qualified in Chile, Haitians often hide them from the general public.

Social isolation –very detrimental to emotional health- is sometimes the result of some of the changes in the social activities performed before: "Really, I almost have not left my house; I live in my own world, my house" (M2). A woman shows her insecurity when she explains why she does not sing as she used to in Haiti at the church, at concerts or on her own. She says: "How can I explain, sometimes one feels closed up, a little, how am I going to do that if I am not in my country. […]" (W2).

5.3 Dealing with Racial Discrimination

When they refer to discrimination, which they often tend not to describe as racism, they mainly state that this is the experience of other Haitians and not of themselves "I have seen people mainly in the consulting rooms that are being discriminated, they [Chileans] say to them that the state is using local funds for you…" (M4). Often, if it has affected them, they tend to justify

it arguing, for example, that it happens in any country, or else, that they do not pay attention to it. That is, they either naturalize discrimination or avoid it. The denial on how this type of situation during microsocial interactions affects them emotionally is recurrent among the interviews (Meertens & Pettigrew, 1997). The attribution to other Haitians for negative reactions to this type of maltreatment, somehow blames their compatriots for their behaviour, an issue that can be characterized as an "incorporation of the racialized stigma" or internalised racism (Goffman, 2006; Jones 2001).

When it comes to their children, their attitude changes slightly. A male interview referring to his children at school argues: "Unfortunately, at 10 and 5 years of age they already feel that they are different, especially due to their hair, because other children are touching them (…). They ask them what it feels like being black […] they [other children] pass their hands over their skin to see if the black child is dirty […]. But at home one tries to support them so that their self-esteem does not decline." (M4).

However, an individual active response to maltreatment can also exist. She adds an anecdote about how she resisted racism, answering back in the following terms: "Once a man I found in the metro, a third age man, said to me 'go away to your own country'. I moved away and he followed me and wanted to push me. I said to him, I know this is not my country but it is not out of pleasure that I am here. And he calls me: 'niger'. Yes, I said I am black and one thing I am not going to change is my skin" (W5). She also comments that past trauma, at the time she had been caught by traffickers in Ecuador, had raised her self-esteem and had strengthened her. Though she prioritizes her own individual resilient capacity, the undoubtedly deep effects of this trauma are not mentioned. This seems to be a typical pattern to understand resilience as a way to underestimate the damage trauma unconsciously generates and which they are unaware of. Lack of awareness, that can be acquired for example in psychotherapeutic sessions, does not mean lack of suffering, as the latter can be displaced towards other dimensions, ex. psychosomatic symptoms, uncontrollable rage, relational problems and so on.

Even when capable of recognizing these processes of discrimination, they do not dramatize them. They tend to consider them as part of the "rules of the game" for being migrants and black in a country that predominantly values white people, economic resources and social inclusion. At another level of analysis, 'turning inwards' is a slightly different type of defence mechanism. It diverges from avoidance.

Abuse at work, when legal standards are not maintained, is frequent: "Before, when I had just arrived, I experienced abuse. I worked at a firm that makes blankets. I had a problem here in my chest that started hurting and I went to the doctor who took X rays and gave me a health license for one week. The firm dismissed me when I returned" (M3). In this case, he did not know how and where to claim in favour of his labour rights. Somebody denounces police and justice maltreatment, thus showing the level in which racism is structural to the society and its public institutions in a postcolonial, neoliberal country that often positively judges itself as culturally homogeneous (Tijoux & Rivera,2015).

Subtle prejudice is illustrated in the following way: "It is something in public, in the bus, at the metro, people see you as different, but in relation to work they look down upon you also, but I could care less because if one knows what one wants to accomplish, it does not matter what

people say. The more people that talk about you, more potent and important the person is" (M 3). He says it with a lot of pride, as another coping strategy.

In Haitian culture, strength is valued as a basic condition for survival. Their ethnic self-affirmation manifests as being proud of their advantages as a labour force versus the Chilean residents as well as other migrants whom they criticize for lack of discipline and rectitude. They also feel better prepared for the demands of the labour market due to their rigorous education and religious commitment to respect and solidarity. A male interviewee nostalgically comments: "And they [the Chileans] do not know that Haiti was the first country in the Region to acquire independence even before the USA. So it helped in the Independence of other countries (directly or indirectly). […] This produced a domino effect" (M4). There is a sensation in these Haitian migrants of not being recognized by Chileans due to the latter´s ignorance on the history of Latin America and on the important place that the Haitian´s pioneering struggle played in its liberation.

Somebody that has greater awareness and confronts racism more openly, a male activist, says: "Now what is worrying me is that as security is a theme here, all the ones engaged in political campaigns will use that topic. And the worse is that they associate insecurity to migration, they are criminalizing migration" (M4). He adds:" This is why I reiterate that the security problem is a problem of the state; it has to do its job."

For this interviewee- member of a migrant collective- the way out of this racial discrimination includes: "looking for the people and groups that have experience in this matter, for the collaboration of other communities that also suffer or have suffered discrimination, either for being black or because they come from another country" (M4)

The latent idea is that social discrimination, when lived in solitude, produces much more harm and also, that other communities have had specific collective ways to confront it. He talks of the existence of multiple collectives and spaces of support. "When I feel suffocated I cannot speak Spanish, it does not come out, it is an effort to think because everything comes together." This symptom clearly shows the stress that discrimination provokes and the rejection of a culture.

He also reminds local residents about the opportunities and economic resources Haitians bring to Chile and that often go unrecognized. For example, between 2017 and 2019 with the payment of Haitian visas and fines, the government collected more than 292.000 million of Chilean pesos (equivalent to 310.577million US dollars of July 2025).

5.4 Narratives on current health and mental health

Most of the participants in this study report good psychosomatic health conditions, interestingly, if the intensity of labour and other efforts they make daily are taken into account. They also seem satisfied of the access they have had to the public health system, because, although they usually face long waiting lines, they know they will finally be treated- a situation that is not common in Haiti. However, it is to be observed that, most interviewees have resourced to the private health system several times. Carreño et al. (2022), however, show the many vicissitudes female Haitians face during pregnancy, birth, child feeding and childrearing due to the public health practitioners´ ignorance of the main habits within Haitian culture.

An extreme case of what Haitians culturally seem to consider as 'health' is that of a man that, in 10 years of settlement in Chile, has never consulted a doctor. He says he never got sick but describes the following situation: "I say never; the flue and all that, it is not a disease, it is nature, when there is a climate change… a lot of dust, as I work in construction […] And talking of silicosis, those things that can affect you, but that is normal and not a disease."(M1) He adds how he had treated these ailments: "Things of life, with flue, one has a fever one or two days… that is not being sick, some bacteria that has affected me. I take a lot of lemon juice, less sugar […] and that goes away and I try to take many baths, as has been done [probably meaning in his culture]. Maybe his vodou practise indicates this type of path to cure minor illnesses, though the possibility of developing silicosis due to his work is not minor, and an exacerbated traditional masculinity seems to impede him checking his lungs routinely – a task that the employers should organize for their workers.

In the opposite direction, some cases of depression are reported as having been medicated but during very short periods of time, e.g. seven to ten days. One depressed woman had had psychiatric and also psychological treatment: "I was treated by a psychologist who understood things, that my parents were there and I am here. She made me understand my reality and accept it" (W1). Grief in mourning loss of roots is continually, directly or indirectly, referred to.

A male participant describes why he developed "an identity crisis after arrival" (M4). He says he was the youngest in the family and too close to his mother ("my mom´s gift") and that, "In Chile I became a man, because I had to struggle on my own, to feed myself, all depended upon myself […] My everyday life changed completely..." The interviewee redefines migration as an experience of growth.

Economic problems are usually associated to higher levels of stress, as shown in other local authors´ studies, e.g. Mercado-Órdenes, M. et al. (2024). Lack of enough sleep, insomnia, increased blood pressure, high levels of stress and anxiety in excess are also illustrated in the narratives of the members of this sample. To have a good sleep means to these Haitians to sleep six hours, which shows that they do not rest enough. They attribute lack of enough sleep or insomnia to: "Grief, worries with my documents that until now have not arrived; the question of documents is very difficult. Sometimes I think, imagine that something happens there [meaning in Haiti], and I can travel [but not come back]" (W1). One interview compares this type of situation with that of being jailed. This can be regarded as an extreme dissonance in the state policies used to govern migration from the aspect of control and management.

The building of communities of belonging and network participation has also been proven to be a social determinant for the protection of migrants´ and their children health and mental health (e.g. Singh et al, 2016; Díaz et. al, 2024; Carreño et. al, 2021; 2022; Sepúlveda, 2020). Among our interviewees, there are several cases where Haitians prefer to live in buildings or communities where they are either the exclusive migrant nationality or the majority one. These arrangements, up to some extent, replace the solidarity that develops in formal migrant collectives, though they do not have the political dimension and influential capacity of the last. A male participant, talking of such housing arrangements explains: "There are rooms and rooms and I live in the second floor. Only Haitians [live there], the building owner, who is also Haitian, likes to have more Haitians as tenants because he lives with less problems […]

We share everything, everything; for example, during holiday periods we organize barbecues together […]' Ah! I bring the meat, the other the beer and so on (M3).

Avilez (2020) studies the way Haitians tend to organize themselves collectively through social media, mainly Facebook, and thus increase their social capital. Postings and videos deal with assistance in documentation, housing arrangements, work, services, products and other everyday needs, as well as, with culture and politics.

Unfortunately, in the sample from our study only one-man reports belonging to a collective of migrants that has face-to-face interaction and of which he is the President (M3). He also considers that belonging to these collectives' forms ones´ character, ones´ appreciation of things and one feels better estimated, as one establishes relationships and learns through constructive criticism. Participation also helps them overcome existential and identity crisis.

There are many limitations in this part of the study as Haitians tend to hide the psychosomatic vulnerabilities they are experiencing, especially their psychological pain, from others and from themselves. Their culture, as said before, is one that values effort and strength for survival and does not engage in presenting weaknesses publicly.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS

Coming back to the initial questions in this study, it can be stated that though mental health for migrants can be treated within public primary health consulting rooms, there is not a systematic national policy that is dedicated to this issue. The approach adopted is mainly psychiatric. In the few cases when psychological treatment is carried out, it is very short and disregards the peculiarities of Haitian culture. There is a recent integration of 'cultural' facilitators into the public health system working on a voluntary basis, but they tend to act as mere translators from Spanish into creole and vice versa. In the case of pregnancy and birth, many of these facilitators are men who do not really understand either the process of child-bearing or the culture of female Haitian migrants (Carreño et.al, 2022).

Moreover, the type of migration governance prevalent in Chile and the region as a whole, based on management and efficient control, largely disregards the wellbeing of new settlers. No explicit protection policy has been found for Haitians. On the contrary, there have been resolutions that restrict their entrance or promote their departure.

Haitian life quality is precarious and based on sheer effort and discipline. Resilience strategies are designed individually, a factor they tend to be proud of, and only sometimes in informal groups with other Haitians. This happens in spite of high interpersonal racism, discrimination and maltreatment towards this nationality –provoking a daily suffering and ill mental health- though frequently not reported as such by the study´s participants. The Haitians interviewed hardly resist discrimination except in intra-psychic and emotional terms at an individual level, or else, ultimately, leave the country they had idealized previous to migration. Communication barriers, a culture that is ignored, devalued or misunderstood and a religion that is feared and ostracized make social integration of this community an enormous challenge.

6.1 Acknowledgements

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