

NU professor studies AIDS and poor women

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Profile

Celeste Watkins-Hayes is studying how Chicago area women living with **HIV/AIDS** -- often the caretakers of their families -- face the challenge of getting and spending money and how that affects their ability to manage their health. Watkins-Hayes, associate professor of African-American Studies and Sociology at Northwestern University, believes economic survival strategies are the missing link in **HIV** research.

"For impoverished populations, living in this economy is clearly a challenge, but living with the added hardships of **HIV** is daunting," Watkins-Hayes stresses.

The goal of the research is to reveal the relationship between economic strategies and health management to determine what social support and financial assistance from public, private and non-profit sources provide the stability necessary to allow women to focus on improving their health following an **HIV** diagnosis.

Watkins-Hayes is principal investigator on her hand-selected research team including Amanda Armour, Elyse Kovalsky, Marisol Mastrangelo, Courtney Patterson, Robert Vargas and Jasmyne McDonald.

From now through mid-summer, team members will interview 150 Chicago area women with **HIV/AIDS**; they then will continue tracking 35 of those women for two years to determine how they fare economically. Watkins-Hayes intends for participants (ages 18 to 65) to be equally divided among those in the labor market, those receiving Social Security or a government subsidy and those not receiving a government subsidy. The team also will interview AIDS-service providers.

"Some participants have found healing in being able to release some of the shame and stigma of their disease," she says. "It has been healing to have someone listen and know that they [the participants] have loves, fears, struggles like the rest of us. For many low-income women, participation is economic survival. The study pays participants \$35, and \$35 is a lot for a woman struggling."

Her current research is an extension of Watkins-Hayes' interest in welfare and the needs of the poor, the subject of her first book, *The New Welfare Bureaucrats: Entanglements of Race, Class and Policy Reform* (2009, University of Chicago Press).

"If we are to improve the delivery of poor-relief services, public institutions must be given the mandates and resources necessary to be effective. I remain optimistic about the power of institutions to help change lives," says Watkins-Hayes.

Sandy Thorn Clark is a local free-lance writer.

TO PARTICIPATE

Area women living with **HIV** and interested in participating in the study should call (877) 737-4758 or e-mail hhrinfo@northwestern.edu.

For additional recruitment and research information, visit the team's Web site at www.hhrstrategies.org.

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