Health Beliefs and the Prevention of Hypertension in a Black Population Living in London

Maxine Newell, DrPH; Naomi Modeste, DrPH; Helen Hopp Marshak, PhD; Colwick Wilson, PhD

INTRODUCTION

Hypertension is the most commonly diagnosed condition in the United Kingdom, and its treatment the "most important single intervention" in the primary care setting; however, national surveys demonstrate that it is substantially underdiagnosed and poorly controlled. Despite the increased prevalence of hypertension among people of African descent compared with other ethnic groups in the United Kingdom, most of the research on hypertension in this population is conducted among persons who have already been diagnosed with hypertension. A key tenet to health education and the changing of health outcomes on a population level is the concept of prevention.

Many psychosocial theoretical models are used by health educators to change or explain behavior. The health belief model has been used to explain and predict health behavior for more than 50 years and is one of the most widely used models. Although the importance of the different model constructs varies within and between cultures and across health behaviors, studies support the validity of these constructs to predict a wide variety of behaviors, especially preventive behaviors.

Most of the literature on the health beliefs of Blacks concerning hypertension, and prevention in particular, comes from the United States. While African Americans correctly associate the use of salt to the development of hypertension, but they did not associate obesity, lack of exercise, alcohol consumption, and smoking with hypertension. Similar findings have been reported in UK Blacks.

The Seventh-Day Adventist church promotes abstinence from smoking and the use of alcohol, a vegetarian or near-vegetarian diet, and an active lifestyle. As such, Seventh-Day Adventist lifestyles are generally healthier than those of non-Seventh Day Adventists. Studies of Seventh-Day Adventist populations in the Netherlands, Japan, Denmark, Norway, and the United States support the finding that a Seventh-Day Adventist lifestyle decreases the risk of disease, including hypertension. Therefore, we used the health belief model to examine the beliefs, perceptions, and behaviors of Black Seventh-Day Adventists living in London and to provide information on the lifestyle practices related to preventing hypertension.

From the School of Public Health, Loma Linda University, Loma Linda, California (MN, NM, HHM); School of Science and Technology, Loma Linda University, Loma Linda, California (CW).

Address correspondence and reprint requests to: Naomi N. Modeste, DrPH; School of Public Health, Loma Linda University; Loma Linda, CA 92350; 909-558-4741; nmodeste@llu.edu

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