

Spirituality plays role in breast cancer information processing for African-American women

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The American Cancer Society estimates that more than 178,000 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer and more than 40,000 will die as a result of breast cancer in 2007. One way to battle these numbers is through increased information sharing and use of early detection methods. A new study from the University of Missouri-Columbia has found that spirituality might play an important role in achieving this, particularly for African-American women.

"Spirituality has been found to be an important cultural factor for African-American women thinking about their health, so we evaluated its impact on breast cancer information processing," said Glenn Leshner, associate professor of radio-television in MU's School of Journalism.

"We found that spirituality positively affected African-American women's willingness to talk about breast cancer, pay attention to information about breast cancer and engage in preventative measures."

Leshner worked with Cynthia Frisby, MU associate professor of strategic communication; I-Huei Cheng, assistant professor at the University of Alabama; Yoonhyeung Choi, assistant professor at Michigan State University, and Hyun Joo Song, a former MU doctoral student. The researchers studied the effects of spiritual locus of control -- the belief that God has control over health -- by conducting surveys in 11 U.S. cities. Then they analyzed the 446 completed surveys (240 from Caucasian women, 206 from African-American women). Results

showed that for African-American women, spirituality had a positive effect on talking about cancer and paying attention to breast cancer messages in the media. For Caucasian women, spiritual locus of control played no role in paying attention to breast cancer information.

"By embracing cultural and ethnic factors, this study helps develop a more holistic health message processing model so that we can better understand processes associated with health message rejection and acceptance, particularly with diverse ethnic groups," Frisby said. "Our results indicate that when a breast cancer prevention message is designed for African-American women, health communicators should consider how to positively utilize the role of spirituality in the women's health message processing."

Although it is less important for most Caucasian women, this study suggests that spirituality can be an important part of learning about and coping with breast cancer for African-American women.

"African-American women in our sample likely perceived both God and themselves as important factors in their own health. This perception seems to encourage African-American women to seek more information and talk about breast cancer to get emotional support and helpful advice," Leshner said.

Source: University of Missouri-Columbia

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