

An appeal to the caregiving values of rural women for breast cancer prevention

March 2 2011

In an effort to develop strategies for breast health awareness in rural populations researchers asked the question, "What message strategies will motivate Appalachian women to attend to breast health issues and become actively involved in their own breast health?" A new study published in the *Journal of Consumer Affairs* finds that two types of reasons motivate rural Appalachian women to perform breast health self-examinations, get mammograms, and to talk with doctors about their breast health.

The women articulated their concerns with the statements, "I need to be around for those I love" and "If I don't take care of myself, no one else will." The Appalachian women used these words as they described their daily lives and their personal responsibilities to others and themselves. The study shows that appealing to their strength as caretakers encourages them to take care of themselves, so that they in turn can live up to their care giving responsibilities.

The current study was able to identify culturally relevant ways to encourage rural women to engage in breast health behaviours. Lead researcher Dr. Eric Haley, "Our research shows that facts and figures don't motivate. Speaking to rural women in a way that recognizes their vital role in family and community motivates women to take control of their health. Regardless of how they are communicated, PSAs, brochures, video, web sites or person-to-person, breast health promotional messages must break through the clutter of all messages in the market."

Past research has shown that rural Appalachian women often feel alienated from health care systems and often don't seek the preventative care they need in order to avoid disruptive, and even fatal, health conditions. Haley, "Other research has emphasized the fatalistic factor at play. Women may have failed to seek health care because in their view, it wouldn't change their individual fates. However, this study found no such factor. In fact, the study showed these women to be strong and willing to take control if motivated to do so."

The research not only provides guidance for public health messages on breast health, but suggests how the messages may also encourage rural Appalachian women to seek other forms of health care. Haley, "Encouraging preventative care saves lives, and cuts medical costs, both private and public, and in fact save lives. The study has implications for public policy on rural [health care](#) initiatives."

More information: "Developing Breast Health Messages for Women in Rural Populations."; Eric Haley, et. al. *The Journal of Consumer Affairs*; Published Online: March 1, 2011 ([DOI: 10.1111/j.1745-6606.2010.01191.x](#)).

Provided by Wiley

Citation: An appeal to the caregiving values of rural women for breast cancer prevention (2011, March 2) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2011-03-appeal-caregiving-values-rural-women.html>

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