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Study: Young African-Americans often have distorted view of stroke risk

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Young African-Americans often hold a distorted view of their personal risk for a stroke, two nursing researchers at Georgia State University's Byrdine F. Lewis School of Nursing and Health Professions say in a recently published study in the *Journal of Neuroscience Nursing*.

Dawn Aycock, assistant professor, and Pat Clark, professor, examined the accuracy of risk perception by comparing a group of young rural African-Americans' perceived risk to their actual risk of stroke.

Stroke is a growing health issue. One-third of strokes occur in people under the age of 65. Young African-Americans have a 50 percent higher chance of having a stroke than Caucasians of the same age. Death rates due to stroke are also higher among African-Americans. Hypertension, diabetes and obesity increase the likelihood of stroke in young adults.

The researchers recruited young African-American patients from a mobile clinic that visits four rural Georgia communities. Participants were on average 43 years old and female and had no physical limitations to exercise. They were asked a series of questions to determine each participant's perception of their personal risk for a stroke in the next two decades. Researchers then matched the questionnaires with personal and family history forms developed from a commonly used stroke risk assessment form created by the American Stroke Association.

Results showed that 47 percent of the participants did have an accurate perception of their risk for stroke. However, another 44 percent underestimated their stroke risk. When researchers compared the perception data to the health history data, they found that 59 percent of the participants had a moderate to high risk of stroke with multiple contributing risk factors. Also, a sizable percentage had a family history of stroke and an even larger percentage smoked or were diabetic. But participants didn't link these health risk factors to the risk of stroke in themselves.

Conclusions of the research were that education on stroke risk must be increased in younger African-Americans. Nurses should find ways to link poor personal health habits with stroke risk for the rural African-American population, the researchers said.

"Many young adults don't know about stroke because it is typically a disease of older adults," Aycock said. "Most strokes can be prevented by changing unhealthy behaviors."

Source:
Georgia State University
