

The Perception of Vietnamese-American Women Towards Cervical Cancer and Prevention Methods



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Background

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Vietnamese-American women have the highest incidence rate of cervical cancer of 43 per 100,000, which is five times higher than the general population. Previous studies have attributed the higher incidence rate to lower cervical cancer screening or Pap test rates. The Human papillomavirus (HPV) is one of the causes of cervical cancer and recently, a new vaccination for HPV called Gardasil has been introduced and promoted as a way to reduce cervical cancer rates. With these resources available, cervical cancer is preventable, yet it still occurs at high rates within Vietnamese-American women.

Through a grant received from the Minnesota's Future Doctors program, I was able to conduct this research project. Created in 2005 by University of Minnesota Medical Students, Gareth Forde and Matthew Fitzpatrick, the goal of the Minnesota's Future Doctors program is to support minority and rural pre-medical students by offering various experiences and skill building opportunities. The program is also designed to address health disparities and help the medical field reflect the diversity present in the communities throughout Minnesota.

Objective

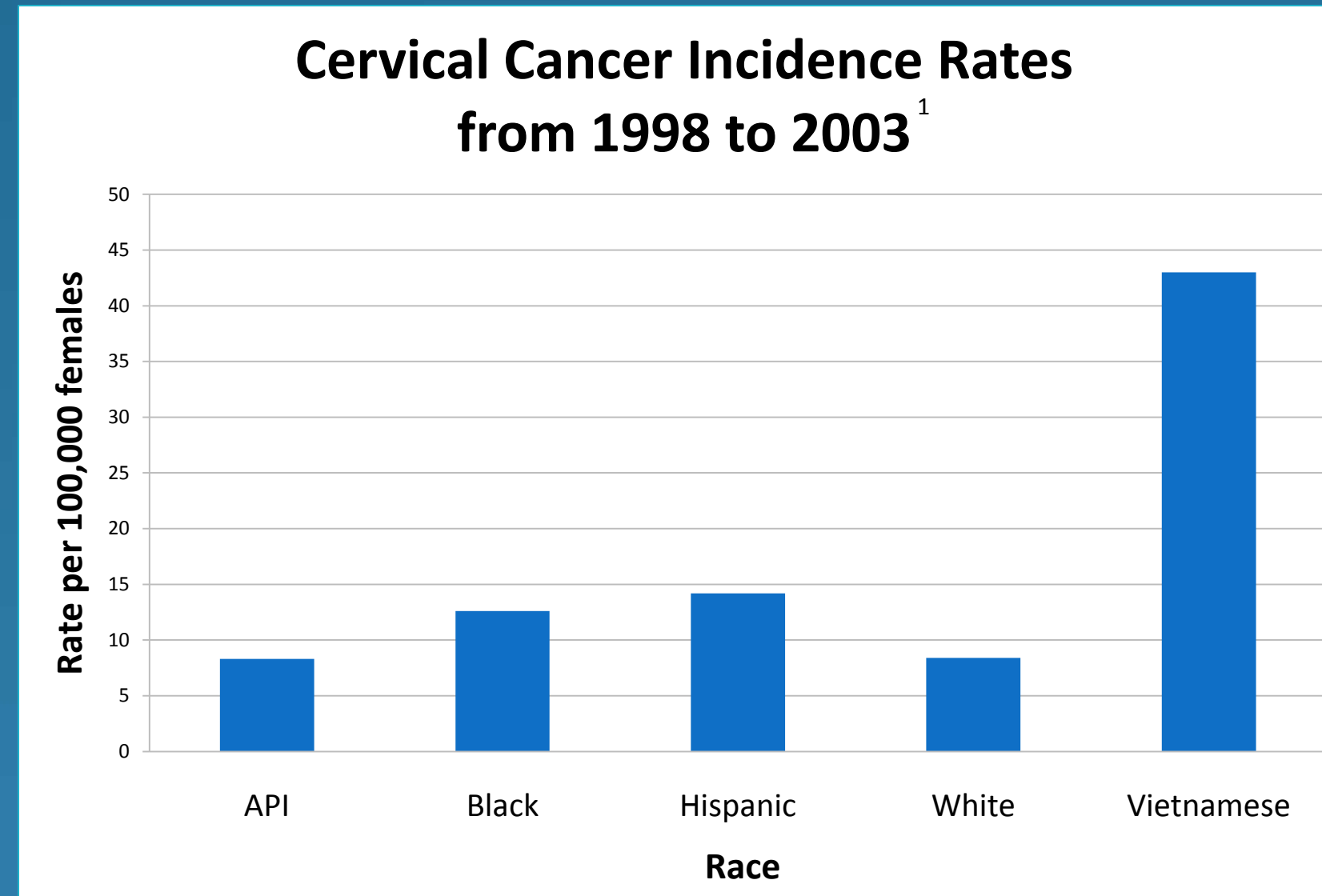
The purpose of this project was to learn about the perceptions Vietnamese-American women have towards cervical cancer and prevention methods. In addition, this project sought to better understand barriers Vietnamese-American women may have in receiving preventative care, such as Pap tests, and ways to increase awareness and usage of preventative medicine.

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Methods

There were two components used to obtain data: self-reported questionnaire and focus group/one-on-one interviews. The questionnaire consisted of 36 questions that asked questions about demographics, cervical cancer screening and prevention awareness and usage, and perceptions about cervical cancer. Focus group and interview participants were asked questions about barriers to receiving preventive care and recommendations for increasing Pap test rates.

Participants

Vietnamese-American women between the ages of 21 to 60 years old and who could read either Vietnamese or English were eligible for the study. There were 30 participants who completed the questionnaire and 6 participants who completed the focus group/one-on-one interviews.

Procedure

Participants were recruited to complete the questionnaire and/or participate in the focus group through either a recruitment table at an April 2009 Vietnamese cultural event in Bloomington or recruitment letters sent to Vietnamese community leaders and organizations.

The questionnaires were completed on site by participants at the recruitment table. The two hour focus group and one-on-one interviews were completed at Augsburg Park Library in Richfield.

Results

From the focus group and questionnaires, the results were focused on three aspects:

- Knowledge of participants
- Barriers for not seeking Pap tests
- Recommendations for increasing cervical cancer awareness and Pap test frequency

Knowledge of Participants

1. Participants had a general understanding of what a Pap test was and its relation to cervical cancer
 - 83% of participants had heard of a Pap test (n=30)
 - 80% of participants had received a Pap test before
2. Understanding of the connection between Pap tests and HPV was not always clear
 - 40% of participants correctly identified HPV as a cause
3. Most participants were not familiar with Gardasil
 - 13% of participants heard of Gardasil
 - 6% of participants correctly identified Gardasil's purpose

Structural Barriers

- No regular source of care or healthcare provider
- Afraid of cost
- Lack of insurance
- Not enough time
- No transportation

Cultural and Personal Barriers

- Unaware of what a Pap test is and its benefits
- Lack of understanding of preventative care
- Pap test is not seen as necessary
- Physically uncomfortable
- Language barrier
- Fatalistic attitude about cancer
- Embarrassment
- Lack of male support
- Sexual health is a taboo topic in the Vietnamese community

Recommendations

- Bring bilingual information directly to people via ESL classes, community led workshops, radio, television, newspaper pamphlets
- More information about Gardasil
- Emphasis needs to be put on importance of pap tests and the connection between HPV and cervical cancer
- More female clinicians and translators
- Regular reminders about Pap tests
- Health care workers and physicians should encourage screenings

Discussion

While more Vietnamese-American women are receiving Pap tests; lack of awareness about cervical cancer and the prevention methods, resources available, and the cultural stigma surrounding sexual health are hindering women from receiving regularly scheduled Pap tests and understanding their significance. Thus, it is important that women feel comfortable and have a better understanding of the importance of preventative care.

Next Steps

Based on the recommendations given by participants, community leaders and health care workers can take the lead by offering bilingual information and promoting available resources while considering the cultural beliefs held by Vietnamese-American women. Participants expressed interest in learning more about cervical cancer and it would be ideal to find ways to effectively disseminate information into the community.

Possible next steps include the creation of bilingual literature and a cervical cancer information workshop and evaluating their effectiveness at increasing Pap test rates and knowledge about cervical cancer and Gardasil. Other possibilities include sharing information about cervical cancer and resources through the Vietnamese newspaper, radio, and television. Together, these measures can help increase awareness of cervical cancer and prevention methods within the Vietnamese community and potentially increase frequency of Pap tests.