

Health Disparities and Health Equity: a Health Care Educators' approach to Educating Nursing students

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Obesity is becoming a global epidemic in both children and adults. The obesity rate in the US is currently 35.1% and cost the US 147 billion dollars in 2008 [1,2]. The group with the highest obesity rate in the US is the African American population which totals 47.8% [1,2]. African American women hold the highest percentage at 58.5%, [1,2]. Research shows there are several health related risks factors associated with obesity such as Cardiovascular Diseases (CVD), hypertension, and diabetes [3-6]. My research focus is on health disparities among African American.

While researching the obesity epidemic among the African American population and the contributing factors, it led to my research interest which examines the bias of health care workers towards obese clients. Most physicians and nurses are totally unaware they have biases. However, the client immediately recognizes that they are being treated negatively [7]. Research has shown that clients who have a negative experience with their physicians are reluctant to seek further care from that practitioner.

My research in this area explored the presence of implicit bias among nursing students and how it has an impact on health disparities. Much of the discussions about implicit bias and health disparities focuses on the clinician's attitudes and stereotypes about race [7-10]. In this study we measured the implicit and explicit bias in a cohort of senior nursing students' towards overweight and obese clients. The study found evidence of implicit bias against overweight and obese clients.

Health disparities among in the African American population. Eliminating racial health disparities is a goal of the US Department of Health and Human Services' Healthy People 2010 and 2020 initiatives (DHHS, 2000; 2010). Racial disparities exist between African Americans and Caucasians and the leading cause of death in the US is cardiac disease [3-6,11]. Although there is an abundance of research on cardiovascular disease, there is a lack of research that examines how African Americans perceive these health inequities [11].

This study explored how African Americans identify

health related risk factors and their assessment of acquiring cardiovascular disease. In the study, we varied the message content (neutral health topics only, Black-White cardiovascular-related disparities and neutral health topics) embedded in a set of public service announcement given to Black and White community members before completing a purported health self-assessment survey. The data suggest that exposure to comparative racial disparities messages concerning cardiovascular health inhibits the persistence of blacks and whites.

The goal of each of my research interest is to help eliminate health disparities, add body of knowledge and to use this information to educate my nursing students and future health care providers.

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