Perceived Cancer Risk among American Indians: Implications for Intervention Research

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Abstract

OBJECTIVE: Perceived risk of disease plays a key role in health behaviors, making it an important issue for cancer-prevention research. We investigate associations between perceived cancer risk and selected cancer risk factors in a population-based sample of American Indians.

STUDY DESIGN and POPULATION: Data for this cross-sectional study come from a random sample of 182 American Indian adults, aged ≥ 40 years, residing on the Hopi Reservation in northeastern Arizona.

OUTCOME MEASURES: Perception of cancer risk was ascertained with the 5-point Likert scale question, “How likely do you think it is that you will develop cancer in the future?” dichotomized into low perceived risk and high perceived risk.

RESULTS: Participants reporting a family member with cancer were more likely, by greater than five times, to report the perception that they would get cancer (OR 5.3; 95% CI: 2.3, 12.3). After controlling for age and family history of cancer, knowledge of cancer risk factors and attitude about cancer prevention were not significantly associated with risk perception.

CONCLUSIONS: Perceived cancer risk was significantly associated with self-reported family history of cancer, supporting the importance of personal knowledge of cancer among American Indians. Further research is needed to obtain a more complete picture of the factors associated with perceptions of cancer risk among American Indians in order to develop effective interventions.