

Background

Chemical straightening products also known as hair relaxers have been used by Black women for decades to alter their natural hair texture. Recent findings highlight the increased risk for cervical and other reproductive cancers due to the harmful carcinogenic chemicals present in these products. Stemming from Eurocentric beauty standards, Black women are hair relaxers' largest consumers, and disproportionately suffer from reproductive/uterine health issues.

Purpose

This study aims to assess Black women's awareness of the increased cervical cancer risk associated with chemical hair straighteners. The purpose of measuring this data is to show a disparity in education of health risks associated with certain hairstyles in the Black community. Ultimately, this research seeks to empower Black women with crucial information for making informed decisions about their beauty routines and health.

Results

- Participants whose family or friends relaxed their hair were nearly five times likely to be currently relaxing their hair compared to those whose friends or family did not relax their hair (OR =4.9, p<0.05).
- Average perceived cancer risk (Range: 1-10) = 6.1
- Black women over the age of 30 were less aware of the increased risk for uterine cancer associated with hair relaxers compared to women under 30.
- **Greater educational attainment was associated with higher perceived risk of hair relaxing ($\beta = 0.8, p<0.05$).**
- Education was not associated with currently relaxed hair.
- Older adults were more likely to be currently relaxing their hair ($\beta = 0.01, p<0.05$).
- Participants living in the northeast region of the U.S are more aware of cervical cancer health risk compared to other regions.

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References

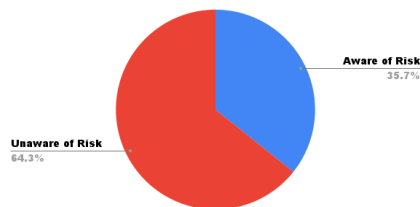
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Methods

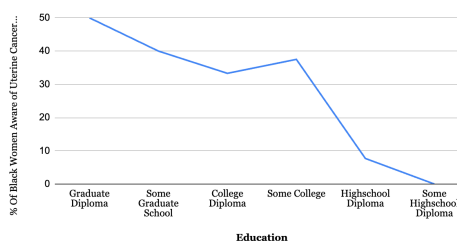
- Anonymous electronic Qualtrics survey with questions to measure awareness of health risk among Black women.
- Eligibility; Black women in the United States between ages 18-65
- 90+ respondents
- 20 States represented

Results

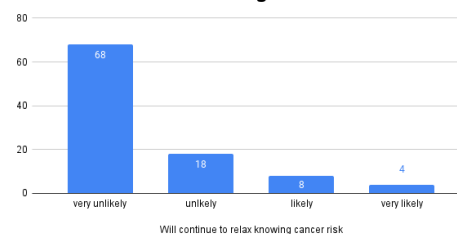
Number of Black Women Aware of Cervical Cancer Risk Associated with Hair Relaxer Use



% Black Women's Awareness of Risk by Education Level



Number of Black Women Who Plan to Continue to Use Relaxers with Knowledge of Cancer Risk.



Participant Testimonials

Black women relax their hair to make it more manageable to style and because it was the beauty standard:

- “My mom had my hair dresser relax my hair at 11. That seemed to be the “coming of age time.” I’m sure I was excited to have straight hair and feel more pretty for being closer to Whiteness.”
- “Was told it was the only way to care for my hair”

Black women learn hair relaxing from their families and culture:

- “I learned about it from my mom because my grandmother relaxed my mother’s hair at a young age.
- “I learned it from the salon/television”

Discussion

Relaxer advertisements promise Black women more “manageable” and “easy to take care of hair”, however, these advertisements never highlight the increased risks of cervical cancer associated with using their products, contributing to the **negative health disparities** we see among Black women today.

Conclusions

Strict regulations need to be established by the FDA on the safeness and ethical standing of hair products like relaxers. **The failure to comprehensively test the ethical standings of products marketed specifically to Black women highlights the institutionalized racism in our healthcare and research system in the U.S.** Health education programs need to be created to equip Black women with the knowledge they need to make informed decisions about their body and health. Additionally, notable warnings should be placed on hair relaxers and similar products to ensure informed decision making.