The Effects of Art Therapy on Hypertension in Black American Women and How It May Help Improve Ones Understanding of Spirituality

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Abstract

**Background:** One of the leading health problems in America is uncontrolled hypertension affecting one out of three Americans. The American Heart Association published an algorithm for implementing alternative approaches to treating hypertension. Creative art therapy was not included. Art therapy blends the therapeutic process of psychotherapy with the art of painting, drawing and sculpture to express emotions that are too difficult to convey in verbal and written communication. The process of art therapy may allow one to express and understand feelings that are influencing their beliefs, which are creating barriers to managing hypertension.

**Objective:** The objective was to investigate the hypothesis that art therapy will lower blood pressure (BP).

**Method:** A descriptive pilot study investigating the feasibility of conducting a single group, pretest-posttest study, determining the effects of art therapy on hypertension was conducted. Participants were hypertensive, urban, black American women recruited from a Faith Community Nurse program. BP’s were measured before and after eight, art therapy sessions, and four weeks following completion and participants completed questionnaires.

**Results:** The sample size was 7 and a Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test was utilized for the analysis. Art therapy made no statistically significant change in BP. A linear regression analysis of the sum of BP changes found a trend of lower blood pressures. There was a mean decrease in systolic BP of 12.25 mmHg. The diastolic BP decreased by a mean of 5.5 mmHg.

**Conclusion:** The sample size was too small to draw any inferences. This concludes that the trend of lower BP warrants further research.

**Implications:** Further research may find art therapy improves understanding of one’s belief systems, spirituality and chronic disease.

This study was evaluated and approved by the Investigational Review Board, at Georgetown University, Washington, DC.