

Minority ethnic families and the challenges to practice a healthy lifestyle

Dr Bertha MN Ochieng

UK

Session 2C

12/3/2010

Explanations of the variations in patterns of healthy lifestyles in Western societies tend to emphasise the importance of individual attitudes towards behaviour, however, for most Black and other visible minority ethnic¹ individuals and families their attitude towards healthy lifestyle is constructed out of their understanding of their realities and their life experiences. This paper explores minority ethnic families' beliefs and perceptions on the barriers to the of a practice healthy lifestyle.

The material is drawn from a larger community-based on the healthy lifestyle attitudes and experiences of Black adolescents and their families. Ten Black families of African Caribbean descent from West Yorkshire, a county in the north of England, participated in the study with in-depth interviews conducted in their homes. The findings indicated that the life experiences of minority ethnic families in particular the socio-economic disadvantages, racism and discrimination is limiting choices for a healthy lifestyle. Indeed, healthy choices principles with their emphasis on illness prevention were considered to be part of the social exclusion paradigm used against Black and other visible minority communities.

The study concludes by suggesting that a healthy lifestyle should not be regarded as a discrete category but as an aspect of material and structural resources through which some communities are not able to take command and control. Significantly, it is essential that nurses working with minority ethnic communities place notions of socio-economic disadvantage, discrimination, marginalisation and racism at the centre rather than the periphery when considering strategies to make healthier choices the easier option for Black and other visible minority ethnic communities.

Footnote

1] The term 'Black' refers to individuals of African descent, while the expression 'visible minority ethnic communities' is used to denote groups that include African, African Caribbean, South Asian and Chinese people living in the UK.