Unfair Treatment Predicts Masked Hypertension in a Community Sample of Black and Latino(a) Adults

Antoinette Schoenthaler EdD¹, Jonathan Tobin PhD², and Elizabeth Brondolo PhD³
¹Center for Healthful Behavior Change, New York University School of Medicine, NY; ²Clinical Directors Network, Inc, NY; ³St. John’s University, Jamaica, NY

BACKGROUND
The prevalence of masked hypertension (MHT) in untreated and undiagnosed adults ranges from 9 – 23% (mean 10%), and 9.4 to 19% in those with a history of hypertension.¹²
•While it is increasingly clear that MHT is a risk factor for cardiovascular (CVD) and cerebrovascular (CVA) disease less is known about the risk factors for MHT.³⁴
•Characterizing the psychosocial stressors that increase the risk for MHT may help to identify those for whom further clinical evaluation is warranted.
•This may be particularly important in minority populations who experience disproportionate rates of CVD and CVA-related morbidity and mortality.¹

OBJECTIVE
To determine whether perceived daily unfair treatment serves as a predictor of elevated ambulatory blood pressure (ABP) levels in a community sample of 630 Blacks and Latino(a) adults.

MEASURES

Daily Unfair Treatment (Predictor Variable): Participants completed an electronic diary (SONY CLIE PDA with the Quest Admin Program) to assess quality of social interactions, with labeled icons illustrating perceptions of being treated unfairly. Participants were trained in the use of the diary and practiced completing diary pages at the time they were outfitted with the ABP monitor. Participants indicated the degree to which they experienced that perception on a scale of 1 – 100.

Blood Pressure (Outcome Variable):
•Clinic Blood Pressure measurements were obtained with the OMRON HEM 704. Three readings were taken 1 minute apart from the participant’s non-dominant arm; they had been seated for at least 20 minutes before obtaining the resting BP measurements.

Ambulatory Blood Pressure measurements were collected using the validated and reliable Suntech Accutracker II (Suntech Medical Instruments, Raleigh NC). After outfitting the participant with the monitor, a series of 8 sitting and standing baseline readings were obtained. During the 24-hour period, participants’ BP was taken every 20 minutes from morning to bedtime and every hour after bedtime (i.e., the time participants reported they were likely to go to sleep).

Masked Hypertension was defined as a normal mean BP at Visit 1 (i.e., SBP ≤ 120 and DBP ≤ 80 mmHg) and elevated mean ABP (i.e., SBP ≥ 135 or DBP ≥ 85mmHg) at Visit 3.

PROCEDURES
•Participants were assessed over the course of three study visits between October 2003 and August 2005.
•At Visit 1, measures of demographics, socioeconomic status (SES), and clinic blood pressure (BP) were collected. Approximately 2 weeks later, during Visit 2, participants were outfitted with the ABP monitor. Participants returned the next day (Visit 3) to receive feedback about their ABP.

RESULTS
•Half of participants were female, black, and had a high school education or some college. The mean age was 39 years and mean BMI was 28.

•A total of 252 of the 630 participants were normotensive (NTN) at Visit 1, of these 105 (42%) had normal ABP at Visit 3 (NTN/NTN) and 51 (18%) had elevated ABP (MHT).

•Those with MHT were significantly more likely to be men and less educated than those in the NTN/NTN group (X² (1) 32.09, p < .001 and X² (2) = 7.43, p < .02, respectively).

•Participants labeled as having MHT were significantly more likely to have higher scores on daily diary measures of unfair treatment (mean = 10.31) than were NTN/NTN participants (mean = 3.74), even when adjusting for participant age, race (p = .001) and gender (p = .002).

CONCLUSIONS
•In this study, a substantial proportion of individuals who appeared fully normotensive at rest went on to display significantly elevated ABP levels.

•Those who showed elevated ABP have experienced more daily unfair treatment.

•Inquiring about patients’ experiences with daily levels of interpersonal conflict may help determine which normotensive patients might benefit from further clinical follow-up.