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Research article

Increasing Physical Activity Among Church Members: Community-Based Participatory Research

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Background

Faith-based interventions using a community-based participatory approach hold promise for eliminating ethnic health disparities. This study evaluated the effects of a volunteer-led statewide program to increase physical activity among members of African-American churches.

Methods

African Methodist Episcopal churches within six regions (Conferences) were randomly assigned to receive training in the program immediately or 1 year later. A cohort of 20 randomly selected churches and 571 members within them took part in telephone surveys at baseline (May–September 2003) and 1 year (May–August 2004) and 2 years later (June–September 2005). Primary outcomes were physical activity participation.

meeting physical activity recommendations, and stage of readiness for physical activity change. Statistical analyses were completed in April 2006.

Results

Volunteers (N=889) from 303 churches were trained. Among survey respondents, physical activity did not increase significantly over time, although 67% were aware of the program. Program awareness was significantly related to all three physical activity outcomes and to fruit and vegetable consumption. Pastoral support was significantly associated with physical activity.

Conclusions

Although this intervention reached a large number of churches and created awareness of intervention components, no effects on physical activity behaviors were found. Potential reasons for the lack of significant effects are discussed.



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