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Paradoxes in Obesity With Mid-Life African American Women

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Abstract

Purpose

To examine the relationship among socioeconomic status, psychological factors (ie, health locus of control, health satisfaction), and health behaviors (ie, physical exercise, eating patterns) in a volunteer sample of mid-life African American women residing within Washington, DC.

Methods

The study's sample included 351 African American women who participated in the 12-week Prime Time Sister Circles (PTSC) intervention and completed the initial self-report survey. Of the women completing the baseline survey, clinical assessments were taken on 277 participants.

Results

The majority (64.4%) of the women were either obese or extremely obese based upon their body mass index (BMI). Fewer than one-third of the women were satisfied with their weight. Despite these outcomes, most (61.8%) of the sample rated their health, in comparison to other African American women, as either good or very good. Further, more than one-half of the women were somewhat to very satisfied with their health knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and their physical, emotional, and spiritual health. There was no significant relationship between obesity level and socioeconomic status, as measured by education, personal income, and total household income. Additionally, there were no significant differences in weight or eating behaviors by education, personal income, and total household income. The findings revealed a significant difference in the number of days the women reported engaging in physical exercise by personal income ($p < .01$) and total household income ($p = .05$), surprisingly, with the women in the lower-income categories reporting engaging in more days of physical exercise than women in the higher-income categories.

Conclusions

This study documents the paradoxes of obesity in mid-life African American women related to socioeconomic status inasmuch as there were no differences observed in the prevalence of obesity by socioeconomic status indicators. The obese women of lower socioeconomic status reported exercising more than obese women of high socioeconomic status. Paradoxically, most of the obese women were dissatisfied with their body weight, shape, and

physical health, but more than 50% were satisfied with their health attitudes and behaviors and 61.8% rated their health favorably. The paradoxes of obesity and African American women across various income levels are important to understand for interventions to succeed.

Keywords

obesity; African Americans; women's health; socioeconomic status

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