**DOES WEIGHT STATUS INFLUENCE PERCEPTIONS OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY BARRIERS AMONG AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN?**

**Background:** Many African-American women fail to participate in regular physical activity. Weight status may influence physical activity barriers. This study examined the frequency and type of barriers.

**Methods:** Participants in this study were enrolled in Project EXE-L (Exercising Ladies Excel), a six-month, church-based, randomized trial of moderate-intensity physical activity based in Baltimore city and county in Maryland. Participants were composed of African-American women who attended one of the participating churches, had friends who were church members, or who lived in neighborhoods surrounding one of the churches. Individuals who were between the ages of 25 and 70 years, were not regularly physically active (defined as not engaging in moderate-intensity activity more than three times per week), and were able to participate in moderate-intensity activity met eligibility criteria to participate in the trial. Barriers to physical activity were evaluated with the Steinhardt/Dishman Barriers for Habitual Physical Activity Scale at baseline.

**Results:** One hundred twenty women were classified as normal weight (body mass index [BMI]: 18.5–24.9 kg/m$^2$), overweight (BMI: 25–29.9 kg/m$^2$), or obese (BMI $\geq$ 30 kg/m$^2$). Obese participants were more likely to report “lack of motivation” as a barrier compared with normal-weight participants (63% vs 31%). Normal-weight and overweight participants were more likely to report no barriers compared with the obese (31%, 0%, 5%, respectively, $P < 0.05$).

**Conclusions:** Barriers for African-American women may vary by BMI status. By defining these unique barriers, effective physical activity interventions can be developed. (Ethn Dis. 2006;16:78–84)

**Key Words:** African-American Women, Barriers, Obesity, Physical Activity

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**INTRODUCTION**

Although the health and psychosocial benefits of regular physical activity are well known, most of the US population fails to participate in recommended levels of physical activity. Current recommendations for physical activity are at least moderate-intensity activity (like brisk walking) for 30 minutes on most days of the week. Women, in particular, are more likely to be sedentary compared with men. Among every category of social class, women report a higher level of physical inactivity compared to men. African-American women are among the least physically active subgroups in the United States. The most recent National Health Interview Survey data (1999–2001) found that 55% of African-American women engaged in no leisure-time physical activity. Hispanic females had a similar prevalence (57%), while prevalence of inactivity was lower in Caucasian women (38%). Although a difference in physical activity exists across socioeconomic status (SES) (higher SES, higher activity), African-American women are less active than their SES-equivalent peers, and high levels of physical inactivity are evident at all SES levels.

In addition to sex and racial discrepancies in physical activity level, individuals who are overweight (body mass index [BMI] $\geq$ 25–29.9 kg/m$^2$) or obese (BMI $\geq$ 30 kg/m$^2$) are less likely to be physically active than their normal weight counterparts. Because overweight and obesity is prevalent in more than three fourths of African-American women, these factors are likely to affect the proportion of African-American women who are physically active.

African-American women, with a high prevalence of sedentary lifestyles, obesity, and overweight, have higher rates of sedentary-related diseases such as coronary heart disease, hypertension, and diabetes. With these combined factors, this population can greatly benefit from increased physical activity. To determine strategies that can be effective for promoting physical activity, relevant barriers to physical activity in this population need to be identified.

One study found that being “too fat” was reported as a barrier to physical activity by women in an urban, representative population survey of Australian adults. Obesity and overweight status may additionally influence the perception of the number and type of barriers to physical activity in African-American women.