



This research has helped a rural North Carolina community develop greater awareness of healthy behaviors to reduce obesity, especially in children.

Examining Dietary Habits of African American Families to Reduce Obesity

Who cares and why?

Limited access to health services due to geographic isolation, combined with high poverty rates in rural areas, create problems particularly knowledge of, and access to, healthy and nutritional foods. These concerns are heightened for African American families and children in rural communities who are often poor and disproportionately affected with health-related problems and obesity.

Project participants are the primary beneficiaries of the information researchers gathered from the study, “Examining Dietary Habits of African American Families to Reduce Obesity.” Participants benefit from this information via a culturally sensitive nutrition and health programming model. The expected outcomes will be available to community health officials and educators who are familiar with the residents of the county and will be able translate and disseminate information in an appropriate and effective manner to reduce community connectivity barriers. Community health forums and other venues will be held for educators and community leaders who are concerned about health disparities and obesity that impact short-term and long-term health concerns of African American children.

What has the project done so far?

The research team worked within a church in Enfield in Halifax County, N.C., a county that has the fifth highest obesity rates in the state.

Drawing from this population, the team administered three focus groups and several assessments to discover how the availability of nutritious foods impact healthy behaviors of children and families. They also conducted three focus groups to gain perspective on how the availability of nutritious foods and nutrition programming affect healthy behaviors.

N.C. A&T researchers found that community and demographic factors play a large role in the physical activity and eating patterns of children and families. The community they examined is very small, very poor and predominately African American which further explains the health disparities and a disproportionate amount of obesity and poverty on one



community. The primary exosystem component that influences the participants is the church, which provides a central focus for many of Enfield's residents.

The impact of this project is reflected in the education and awareness of participants. The community-based participatory research model includes the participants, church and community at-large to become involved in the sharing and delivery of health and wellness information. Some of the project participants have created the Ladybugs ministry, which focuses on faith, family, friendships, as well as fresh fruits and vegetables. This project has impacted various family systems in the selection and preparation of foods. Participants also report that a food diary they kept as part of the project research, held them "accountable" and made them aware of everything they were eating (including good and bad habits)..

Impact Statement

This community-based participatory research project has led to greater awareness of healthful selection and preparation of foods by African American families who participated. It also provided a church health ministry with information and tools for ongoing education to build awareness of healthy eating within the community it serves.

What research is needed?

The quantitative and qualitative data from focus groups and surveys will be analyzed. Preliminary analysis of the focus-group data reveals participants have made adjustments in their dietary habits and in helping children and other family members to make healthy changes as well.



Want to know more?

Dr. Meeshay Williams-Wheeler, mwwheele (336) 285-3634

Funding for this project was provided by the Evans Allen Program within USDA's National Institute for Food and Agriculture (NIFA). It addresses the NIFA priority "Childhood Obesity," intended to support programs that ensure that nutritious foods are affordable and available, and that individuals and families are able to make informed, science-based decisions about their health and well-being.

