



Older Women's Attitudes About Physical Activity

Betsy Kelley, Outreach Specialist, UWExtension

Because of the lack of information about women of color and their health needs, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention funded several projects in the 1990's to examine minority racial groups and their physical activity involvement. In-depth interviews were conducted with 56 women by the University of South Carolina School of Public Health to inform development of the Cross-Cultural Activity Participation Study (CAPS). The purpose of the interviews was to investigate the psychosocial context and sociocultural meanings of physical activity for older African American and American Indian women.

Most of the women interviewed believed physical activity was important for physical and mental health reasons – but most of the women were not active on a regular basis. They also had trouble understanding the distinction between physical activity and structured exercise, despite interviewers' efforts to clarify the terms.

The women associated being physically active with feeling good, being with others, being and feeling healthy, and experiencing spiritual and psychological benefits.

The major constraint to being physically active for most women was lack of time. Many understood that a number of other factors contributed to lack of time: job demands, physical tiredness, illness and ailments, family expectations and needs, economic constraints, safety issues, weather and environment, the hassle of personal care (eg, showering, doing hair), and lack of facilities and opportunities.

Social support was both a barrier and a facilitator to being physically active. Those who were physically active often used social networks to find companions for physical activity. On the other hand, the "ethic of care," where women put the needs of other family members before their own, constrained time available for physical activity.

The authors commented that these women were sedentary, but busy. Most described important differences between their weekday and weekend schedules. Weekends were described as a time to both "catch up" and "relax." Few women described planning physical activity on weekends.

African American women did not identify anything particular to being African American that influenced their attitudes or practices about physical

activity. One woman commented that as a child she was active, but she did not remember ever seeing adults doing active things in their leisure time because they were always working.

Several American Indian women mentioned how important physical activity was to their culture in the form of traditions and ceremonies, and commented how assimilation into urban life had changed their daily lives and traditions.

The authors noted that these women seemed to understand the benefits of physical activity, but that the perceived benefits did not outweigh the constraints enough to motivate them to be physically active. Many of them, however, were open to the idea of being more active and were contemplating behavior change.

Previous research has shown that walking is one activity that most women perceive as accessible and enjoyable. From these interviews, four themes emerged that could help educators promote walking to this group:

- Adaptability and availability: people can walk almost anywhere.
- Social and/or solitary benefits: time spent with friends or quiet time alone.

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Wisconsin Nutrition Education Network

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Dietary Quality and Physical Activity of Low-income Individuals

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Poor diet and lack of physical activity are significant contributing factors to 4 of the 10 leading causes of death in the United States: heart disease, certain types of cancer, stroke, and diabetes. Diet also adversely influences such disorders as obesity, hypertension, and osteoporosis. Altogether, diet-linked diseases account for an estimated \$250 billion each year in increased medical costs and lost productivity. As documented in the national objectives of Healthy People 2010, improving the American diet and physical activity patterns could reduce the occurrence of cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, and cancer. The importance of educational interventions to improve nutrition and physical activity behaviors is further documented by reports from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention stating poor diet and physical inactivity are associated with 300,000 deaths each year, second only to tobacco use.

In the year 2001, 11.7% of Americans lived in poverty. The percentage for children is even higher: 16.3% of American children lived in poor households in 2001. Low-income families tend to have poorer quality diets, as measured by the USDA's Healthy Eating Index, and less extensive knowledge about nutrition recommendations and ways to improve the nutritional quality of their diets than families with more financial resources. More specifically, low-income individuals are less likely to meet the Guideline recommenda-

tions for fat, saturated fat, fiber, cholesterol, and sodium. Many poor people rely on food stamps to keep from going hungry. The goal of the Food Stamp Nutrition Education Program is to provide educational programs that increase, within a limited budget, the likelihood of all food stamp recipients making healthy food choices consistent with the most recent dietary advice as reflected in the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and the Food Guide Pyramid.

Choosing and preparing foods with less fat and sugar.

- Nationally, just 38% of adults meet dietary fat recommendations and 69% meet dietary cholesterol recommendations.
- In Wisconsin, low-income persons entering WNEP were asked if they choose low fat foods instead of high fat foods. 43% said they seldom or never do this.
- Nationally, the number one source of added sugars in the American diet is carbonated soft drinks, which amount to approximately one-third of added sugars consumed in America. Soft drink consumption is on the rise among children, and may contribute to obesity due to excess calorie consumption, or to declining diet quality due to the replacement of more nutritious foods.
- In Wisconsin, low-income persons entering WNEP were asked if they think about healthy food choices when deciding what to feed their families. 50% said they do this sometimes, seldom, or not at all.

Balancing the food we eat with physical activity.

- In Wisconsin, the prevalence of obesity (BMI ≥ 30) among adults has increased from 12.7% in 1991 to 22.4% in 2001. Weight data on Wisconsin children is limited, but among 2 to 5 year old children from low-income families (mostly WIC participants), 11.4% were over-

weight (>95th percentile BMI) in 2001. The prevalence varies by population: white 10.3%, African American 9.8%, Hispanic 14.9%, American Indian 17.6%, Asian 14.6%.

44% of respondents said they do [active things] sometimes, seldom, or not at all.

- In Wisconsin, 39.6% of adults reported being physically active for 30 minutes or more at least 5 days per week in 2001. In 2001, 27.6% of Wisconsin high-school age youth were physically active for 30 minutes or more at least 5 days per week.

- In general, prevalence of obesity is higher in women and in low-income populations.
- In general, low-income populations are less active than higher income populations, females are less active than males, and activity levels decline with age.
- In Wisconsin, low-income persons entering WNEP were asked if they are active doing things like walking, gardening or heavy house work for at least 30 minutes most days. 44% of respondents said they do this sometimes, seldom, or not at all.

Nutrition Knowledge, Motivation, and Behavior

Teaching people about nutrition does not automatically lead to a change in their eating behavior. People must also have a reason to make changes (motivation), and they need to feel that making the change is possible for them. Motivation can come in the form of avoiding a negative (a person wants to avoid heart disease or weight gain) or achieving a positive (better health, more energy). Helping people feel that they have the power to make a change involves giving them "how to" information and making recommendations that take little money, time, and effort to implement.

Full text of this report, with links to references, can be found at: <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/wnep/p4/pdfs/04resdq.pdf>



The Summer Food Service Program in Milwaukee County

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Jon Janowski, Director of Advocacy, Hunger Task Force of Milwaukee, Inc.

The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) was created by Congress in 1968 to ensure that children in lower-income areas could continue to receive nutritious meals during school vacations, when they did not have access to school meals. The program allows for the provision of healthy meals and snacks to children and teenagers, 18 years and younger, at approved sites in low-income areas. The program also benefits low-income parents by easing their financial strain during the summer months, and school and non-profit food service workers who realize year-round employment. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service administers the SFSP as a non-profit, cost-justified program, providing reimbursement from the federal level to local sponsors to cover food and administration costs.

During the summer of 2002, the SFSP served 17% of eligible students in Milwaukee County and brought \$1.2 million in federal funding to the local economy (52% of the total for the state of Wisconsin) for food and administrative reimbursement. Milwaukee County utilized 10 SFSP Sponsors, including schools, day camps, and non-profit agencies supporting food at 142 host sites.

Major findings include:

- The SFSP's underutilization by sponsors and food sites prevents thousands of eligible students from accessing nutritious meals during the summer when school is not in session.
- If 100% of the eligible population of Milwaukee County students (over 97,000) had been served, \$23.2 million in federal funding would have flowed into Milwaukee County.
- Of the students who actually participate in the SFSP, most do not have access to food sites in the two weeks following the end of spring classes, and in

the four weeks leading up to classes in the fall.

- Need for the SFSP in Milwaukee County is demonstrated by high rates of child poverty, record usage of food pantries, low food stamp utilization, and families with two working parents.
- Due to the advantages of institutional capacity, schools are the ideal summer food providers.

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- 90% of school officials surveyed indicated that children who have access to nutritious meals throughout the year perform better in school.
- 89% of school officials who participated in the SFSP during the summer of 2002 indicated that having the SFSP available was beneficial for their students.
- Outreach and education is needed to attract new SFSP Sponsors and food sites.

Recommendations

To maximize the number of qualified students served through the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) in Milwaukee County, the following recommendations should be implemented:

1. The Milwaukee Public School District (MPS) should prepare and provide meals to all MPS Summer Recreation Sites, Community Learning Centers, and summer schools – with all sites operating as open sites, accessible to every student in the community, during the summer of 2003.

2. The Social Development Commission (SDC) and the Opportunities Industrial Center of Greater Milwaukee (OIC-GM) should prepare and provide meals to high-need geographic locations throughout Milwaukee County not serviced by MPS during the summer of 2003.
3. All Milwaukee County SFSP Sponsors should plan and prepare to operate all food sites for the entire summer (June – August) before June 2005.
4. The Greater Milwaukee Food Providers Coalition should implement the outreach strategies outlined in the report, "Marketing the Summer Food Service Program in Milwaukee County" for and during the summer of 2003.
5. The Greater Milwaukee Food Providers Coalition should recruit additional organizations to serve as SFSP Sponsors and/or food sites for the summer of 2003.

Full text of this report can be found at <http://www.hungertaskforce.org>

For nationwide statistics, see *Feeding Low-Income Children When School Is Out—The Summer Food Service Program: Final Report* <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/efan03001/>



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Our Mission

The Wisconsin Nutrition Education Network facilitates collaborative planning of nutrition education programs at the state and local levels. We promote healthful and enjoyable eating so that Wisconsin's low income individuals and families receive consistent, positive, relevant, accurate, and effective nutrition messages.

Nutri-Net News is published quarterly. It is available on the web or by mail.

2003 Campaign Underway... Planning for 2004!

Walk, Dance, Play...Be Active Every Day! is now in full swing in 46 Wisconsin counties, Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council and the Menominee Reservation. This multi-agency nutrition education campaign educates food stamp eligible parents, grandparents, and guardians about the need to serve as good role models by engaging in regular physical activity and healthy eating habits in order to encourage healthy habits in their children and grandchildren. Nutrition educators from WNEP, WIC, Elderly Nutrition, schools and Head Start are enthusiastically promoting the **Walk, Dance, Play** message using interactive displays, tip sheets, posters, magnets, press releases, newsletter articles, and school lunch menu backs.

Partner agencies will collect outcome data to measure their success in accomplishing the campaign's objectives:

1. Increasing or strengthening local partnerships and cooperation with other agencies that provide nutrition education to limited-income audiences.
2. Food stamp eligible parents, grandparents, and guardians of children will adopt one or more strategies for being more physically active.
3. Food stamp eligible parents, grandparents, and guardians of children will choose healthy snacks along with physical activity.

Campaign evaluations are due to Betsy Kelley by **June 15, 2003**. It would be

helpful if campaign coordinators could submit all partners' evaluations together in one packet. The final report of the evaluation results should be ready in August.

We would appreciate feedback on the tip sheets as soon as possible as we may reprint them soon with remaining FY 2003 funds. Please let Betsy Kelley or Kate Pederson know if you have suggestions or possible revisions.



Network Update

At the last quarterly Network meeting held on April 24, 2003, plans were discussed for the **Walk, Dance, Play** Spring 2004 campaign. The campaign will be substantially the same as 2003, but may involve an additional component for

youth if funding allows. If you have ideas or suggestions for the 2004 campaign, please send them along with your 2003 campaign evaluations. We want partners as well as participants to enjoy **Walk, Dance, Play!**

Older Women and Physical Activity

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- Identification with cultural traditions: more relevant for American Indian women.
- Perceptions that walking is "not really exercise," a positive connotation.

Four common constraints that should be addressed are:

- Weather
- Safety
- Physical/emotional tiredness
- Not having walking partners

Women in these interviews found walking to be enjoyable when they had choices about when, where, how and with whom it was done. Educators can encourage women to look at ways to make the constraints "negotiable" and to make choices about the settings in which they want to walk.

Henderson KA and Ainsworth BE. *Am J Public Health*. 2003;93:313-317.