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Physically Active, Low-Income African American Women: An Exploration of Activity Maintenance in the Context of Sociodemographic Factors Associated with Inactivity

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Abstract

Increasing physical activity among low-income African American women is an important target for addressing racial and economic disparities in chronic conditions and related risk factors. While barriers to physical activity for women have been examined empirically, successful strategies for navigating those barriers among physically active, low-income women have not been thoroughly explored. Informed by grounded theory, we conducted in-depth individual interviews between 2007–2010 with 14 low-income

African American women who were physically active at nationally recommended levels for one year or more. We analyzed the data using thematic analysis techniques. Key themes emerged in three main categories: motivation for maintaining active lifestyle, strategies for maintaining physical activity, and challenges to maintaining physical activity. Important motivations included getting or staying healthy, social connections, and gratification. Two planning strategies emerged: flexibility and freedom. Critical challenges included financial constraints, physical strain and history of sedentary relapse. The motivations, strategies and challenges reported by low-income African American women who successfully maintained an active lifestyle provided important information for developing effective health promotion strategies for their inactive and underactive counterparts. A qualitative, asset-based approach to physical activity research contributes rich data to bridge the gap between epidemiological knowledge and community health improvement.

KEYWORDS:

physical activity | African American | women | qualitative methods

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Dr. Amy E. Harley PhD and MPH and RD et al.
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