

Barbara Lohse, Kristen Arnold

Assessment of perceived physical activity levels among low-income women in Pennsylvania reveals need for attention to physical activity in nutrition education. Annual Meeting of the International Society for Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity. Austin, Texas; May 23-26, 2012

Abstract

Purpose: Perceived levels of physical activity and attitudes were examined among low-income women and were compared to bio-psychosocial factors.

Methods: Self-reported physical activity information was gathered with an online survey in conjunction with completion of a web-based nutrition education module that included a lesson on physical activity. Eligibility criteria included being SNAP-eligible and between 18-45 years of age.

Results/Findings: Participants (n=512) were from selected counties in Pennsylvania. Food insecurity was prevalent; 65% received SNAP benefits in the past year. Although 51% (n=256) denoted being physically active with 71% (n=362) reporting an activity level \geq 30 minutes/day, 60% were overweight or obese. Those who considered themselves physically active were more likely to be younger (P=0.03), of normal weight (Chi Sq 33.4, P<0.001), more satisfied with their weight (Chi Sq. 48.4, P<0.001), assigned a higher ranking to their eating habits (P<0.001), and worried less about having enough money for food (Chi Sq. 13.7, P=0.008) compared to those who did not consider themselves to be physically active. Women, physically active \geq 30 min/day, tended to dislike fewer foods (P=0.003), and had greater food preference (P=0.005). Eating Competence (EC), a bio-psychosocial construct of eating behavior measured with a validated survey, was higher among those who considered themselves to be physically active (Chi Sq. 16.8, P<0.001) and those who reported exercising >30 min/day (Chi Sq. 10.0, P=0.002).

Conclusions: A majority of low-income women self-reported being physically active. Association with positive eating behaviors supports education to increase physical activity of low-income women.