

# AN EXPLORATION OF COLLEGE WOMEN'S KNOWLEDGE OF OSTEOPOROSIS RISK FACTORS AND PREVENTION

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**Introduction.** Osteoporosis is a preventable disease that is a major health risk for millions of people in the United States, the majority of which are women. The key to the prevention and early detection of this public health problem is increasing the awareness of the disease and educating vulnerable populations of the risk factors of osteoporosis at an early age. Many college students are uninformed regarding preventive behaviors and fail to engage in these behaviors before bone mass attrition has been completed.

**Purpose.** The purpose of this quantitative descriptive study was to determine the level of knowledge college women at a large southeastern public university possess concerning osteoporosis risk factors and prevention behaviors, and to determine how much having a relative or close friend with osteoporosis or decreased bone density might impact the knowledge level. **Method.** This study used the revised Facts On Osteoporosis Quiz (FOOQ)(Ailinger, Lasus, & Brown, 2003) to determine the level of knowledge possessed by 725 college women, aged 19 to 24 years, recruited from various classes, sororities, and the school of nursing at a large southeastern public university. Scores were calculated based on the percentage of correct answers on the FOOQ. **Results.** The study found that the majority of the participants did not have adequate knowledge of osteoporosis risk factors and prevention ( $\chi^2=63.7\%$ ). There was no significant difference in knowledge of osteoporosis among participants who have a friend or relative with osteoporosis, those who did not have a friend or relative with the disease, and those who did not know ( $p=.104$ ). However, there were significant differences ( $p=.000$ ) in knowledge among participants that were health science majors which included nursing ( $\chi^2=69.6\%$ ), education majors ( $\chi^2=58.5\%$ ), and all other majors ( $\chi^2=62.8\%$ ) represented in the study. Also, there was a significant difference ( $p=.000$ ) in the scores of the Caucasian female students ( $\chi^2=64.3\%$ ) and the African-American female students ( $\chi^2=53.1\%$ ).

**Conclusion.** Many college women have limited osteoporosis-related knowledge, which may be an obstacle to the practice of preventive behaviors and avoidance of risky behaviors, such as smoking, ingestion of excessive amounts of alcohol and caffeine, intake of inadequate amounts of calcium, and absence of weight-bearing exercise. Outcomes of this study could have strong implications for the development of educational programs to meet the identified needs of the college female student regarding osteoporosis risk factors and prevention.