

## AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN'S PERCEPTION OF WEIGHT AND EXERCISE

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**Purpose:** Obesity and physical inactivity, two modifiable risk factors for chronic illnesses, are known problems in the United States. Data indicated that 30% of European-American women are overweight, and 60% of African American women are overweight. A lack of physical exercise is seen in 39% of white women and 57% of women of color. Though the current literature indicated African American women are more overweight and less active than their Caucasian counterparts, a gap is noted with respect to a clear explanation for this phenomenon. Few studies have examined the perceptions and meaning that African American women give to the definition of weight and physical activity. The aim of this pilot study was to obtain useful information to describe African American women's meaning of weight and exercise.

**Method:** A qualitative study was used to gain information related to African American women and their definitions of weight and exercise. The use of focus group methodology has been successful in uncovering information in other studies using African American participants to determine exercise beliefs and perceptions of weight. Therefore, a focus group approach was used to guide this pilot study. African American women ages 45 and older were recruited from two different rural southeastern community churches. Through the use of flyers and church announcements, African American women were provided information related to the study and given an opportunity to volunteer. Two independent focus group sessions were conducted using a set of 10 questions. Each session lasted between 45 minutes and one hour.

**Data Analysis:** Data will be analyzed using content analysis. Content analysis will be used to identify categories that emerge out of the focus-group data. The data will be systematically sorted to establish salient categories within and across the individual lived experiences of each woman. A checklist of the prominent categories will be subsequently developed based on the participants' responses and comments.

**Findings:** While the research study is completed, data analysis has not been finalized. However, findings from the study have implications for designing interventions that will improve the overall health status of African American women. Results will also support those factors that help identify behaviors that may lead to a reduction in obesity and weight gain for African American women.