

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FATHER'S DISCUSSION AND INVOLVEMENT AND THEIR SON'S EXERCISE AND NUTRITION BEHAVIORS

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Purpose: Adolescent obesity is a growing epidemic. Men and racial and ethnic minority groups have higher prevalence of obesity and burden of chronic disease associated with obesity. The purpose of this study is to examine the role of fathers and father-figures in influencing their adolescent son's exercise and nutrition behaviors. **Methods:** Data were obtained from 274 dyads of fathers and their sons enrolled in a HIV intervention study entitled The R.E.A.L. Men Project. Participants were randomized to a HIV intervention or to a nutrition and exercise program. The fathers attended six intervention sessions and adolescents attended the final session with the fathers. At baseline, the fathers enrolled in the study were black or African-American (95.7%) with a mean age of 40 ± 11.7 years. The sons were black or African-American (93.9%) with a mean age of 12 ± 1.2 years. The relationship of adolescent to father was biological (41.5%), stepson (13.7%), nephew (10.1%), brother (7.9%), family friend (6.5%), and other (18.8%). More than half of these fathers lived with their son (63.6%). The father's discussion/involvement of exercise and nutrition with their son was measured using 6-items created by the researcher to assess if the father talked about or included their son in exercise and nutrition behaviors ($r=.84$). The son's self-efficacy for preparing and eating fruits and vegetables was measured by a 7-item Self-Efficacy for Nutrition Scale ($r=.86$). The son's perceived confidence in ability to exercise was measured with a 7-item Self-Efficacy for Exercise Scale ($r=.89$). The son's physical activity was measured with a 9-item index Physical Activity Questionnaire developed for African Americans ($r=.71$). The son's fruit and vegetable intake was measured using 3-items from the National Cancer Institute Fruit and Vegetable Screener ($r=.63$). All relationships reported are partial correlations controlling for intervention group. **Findings:** Father's discussion/involvement in exercise and nutrition was related to the son's self-efficacy for exercise ($r=.17, p=.03$) and nutrition ($r=.16, p=.04$) and fruit/vegetable intake ($r=.16, p=.03$). For fathers and sons who lived together, discussion/involvement was related to son's exercise self-efficacy ($r=.25, p=.004$), nutrition ($r=.23, p=.01$), and fruit/vegetable intake ($r=.26, p=.004$). For biological fathers and their sons, discussion/involvement was significantly related to the son's exercise self-efficacy ($r=.23, p=.05$) and physical activity level ($r=.27, p=.02$). The correlation between discussion/involvement and the son's self-efficacy for exercise ($r=.35, p=.01$) and son's physical activity level ($r=.33, p=.01$) was strongest for biological fathers who live with their sons. **Discussion:** These findings indicate that father's involvement and discussion with their sons will enhance adolescent nutrition and exercise behaviors. Nursing interventions aimed to decrease obesity should target both fathers and sons together.