

HEALTHY HEARTS PROJECT: A COMMUNITY-ACADEMIC PARTNERSHIP FOR CARDIOVASCULAR RISK REDUCTION IN A RURAL SOUTHERN COMMUNITY

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Purpose: Cardiovascular disease (CVD) is the leading cause of death in the U.S., accounting for nearly 40% of all deaths. Geographically, CVD mortality rates are higher among people living in southern states. In Georgia, rates of modifiable risk factors for CVD (obesity, diabetes, inactivity, cigarette smoking) are higher than the national rates, particularly minority populations. The *Healthy Hearts* project was a community-academic partnership that was developed to reduce modifiable risk factors for CVD in a culturally diverse rural community in Georgia. Federally funded and implemented in the year 2000, the three-year program objectives were to: (a) provide screening, treatment, and CVD prevention education to industry employees, school children, and farmworkers through community outreach; and (b) demonstrate measurable and sustained change in modifiable risk factors. The *Healthy Hearts* project was identified as a model for practice in *Rural Healthy People 2010*.

Method: The collaborative project involved a rural health clinic, the local school system, local public health department, and a university school of nursing. CVD screening, follow-up, and prevention education were provided to a total of 3387 participants, including: (a) elementary, junior, and high school students; (b) industry employees; and (c) farmworkers and their families to a total of 2390 adults and 997 children.

Findings: Univariate analysis indicates high rates of smoking (29%), physical inactivity (75%), prehypertension (33%), hypertension (29%), obesity (36%), overweight (33%), and elevated cholesterol (42%) among adults in the community. Among children, 13% had elevated BP, 20% were obese, and 15% were overweight. Analysis of rates of modified behavior changes reported among employees in one industry ($n=59$) indicated healthy eating (53%), lower BP (49%), smoking cessation (61%), and controlled blood sugar (51%). Final descriptive analysis and inferential analysis is currently underway and will be reported at the presentation.

Discussion: Preliminary findings suggest that CVD risk factors were higher than state and national rates among adults and children in this small rural community. This project suggests that a collaborative approach to reducing modifiable CVD risk factors is an effective community intervention approach.