

Mixed Methods with Strategic Collaborations: Systematically Designing an After-School Physical Activity and Nutrition Program

Kara C. Hamilton, PhD¹, Shewanee Howard-Baptiste, PhD¹, Kori J. Hahn, MS¹, Melissa C. Powell, PhD, RDN¹, E'tienne F. Easley, MSA², and Melissa J. Graham, MEd³

(1) Department of Health and Human Performance, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga; (2) Family Partnership Specialist, Orchard Knob Elementary School; (3) Opportunity Zone Hamilton County Schools

What Is the Purpose of this Study/Review?

- This paper describes how community surveys and focus groups were used to inform the design of a physical activity and nutrition after-school program for underserved, minority children.

What Is the Problem?

- In the United States, roughly one-third of the children are overweight or obese, and those children who reside in low socioeconomic status communities are even at greater risk for obesity than those who do not.
- Although many programs for children have been designed and implemented over the past two decades to increase physical activity levels and to improve healthy eating habits, most have not shown lasting success. One possible reason for the lack of success is the failure to include community input when designing health-related programs.

What Are the Findings?

- The results from the survey showed that for the particular community of interest, parental support of physical activity and physical activity beliefs of the child were the two most important factors that impacted physical activity behavior of the child. The most important factors impacting a child's overall nutritional status were water intake, whole grain intake, and fruit and vegetable intake. Therefore, the future after-school program should focus specifically on these factors.
- The major challenges derived from the focus groups regarding physical activity in children appertained to parental support, transportation, and activity costs.
- A nutrition-related idea from the focus groups that parents, teachers, and administrators emphasized was "show-and-tell" children about the importance of drinking water and eating more whole grains, fruits, and vegetables.
- Statistical models can be used in a practical and applied way, namely, to help community stakeholders identify the relevant health-related factors that should be targeted in a community program designed to improve health.

Who Should Care Most?

- Community school coordinators, directors of after-school programs, school administrators, and teachers.
- Academics and other educators interested in promoting health and working collaboratively to decrease the rates of chronic disease in underserved areas.

Recommendations for Action

- Retrieve community input in a systematic way, such as by designing a needs assessment survey, generating a statistical model from the survey results, and conducting mini-focus groups, so that the community can prioritize its efforts to efficiently address the most pressing factors that are impacting the health issues of interest.