

HAMILTON, MONAIR J., Ph.D., December 2005

HEALTH EDUCATION  
AND PROMOTION

AN ANALYSIS OF THE INFLUENCE OF THE SOCIAL SUPPORT THEORY ON  
PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AMONG AFRICAN-AMERICAN COLLEGE-AGE WOMEN  
(174 pp.)

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The purpose of this study was to analyze the impact of social support (family, friend), selected demographics (age, enrollment status, marital status, fraternity/sorority membership, current residence, employment status), BMI, and perceived environmental safety on physical activity within groups of African-American college-age women at two separate universities.

A sample of 179 African-American women undergraduates (18-24 years old) from two separate southern universities completed a 40-item self-report instrument that assessed social support constructs on four levels of physical activity: vigorous activity, flexibility activity, strength and endurance activity, and moderate activity. Separate Pearson's correlation analyses were conducted assessing BMI, social support (family), social support (friend), and demographic items: age and employment status. ANOVA was used to assess the subjects' perceived environmental safety. The remaining demographics were assessed using t-tests for enrollment status, marital status, current residence, and fraternity/sorority membership.

Frequency analyses indicated that most subjects engaged in one of four levels of physical activity at both universities. Subjects that were physically active generally felt safe exercising in their neighborhood and on the university campus. The correlation

analysis conducted to examine the relationship between social support and physical activity revealed friend social support to be much stronger than family social support among the subjects at both universities. This is contradictory to past findings from the Social Support and Exercise Survey, which concluded that "family involvement in exercise was more extensive than friend involvement" (Sallis, Grossman, Pinski, Paterson, & Nader, 1987, p. 833).

Results suggest that sustained social support around physical activity could promote positive lifelong health behaviors that adolescents carry with them through adulthood. A climate of a pro-physical activity in the university setting, faith-based physical activity programming utilizing social support constructs, and strong racial/ethnic views that reinforce larger body size among African-American women are all important issues that should be addressed in program development. Tempering cultural attitudes with health information and stressing the importance of regular physical activity could assist in influencing future behavioral outcomes among African-American college-age women.