

Unequal Opportunities, Unequal Outcomes: Reducing Physical Inactivity in Populations of Ethnic Minority Girls

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Physical inactivity is one of the leading health indicators categorized by the Healthy People 2010 report, which calls for eliminating the gap between those who are active, and those who are not. Ethnic minority girls are less likely to be physically active than Non-Hispanic white girls, and their male counterparts. Given that many urban schools fail to allocate funding for physical education, privately organized physical activities may be the only viable outlet to increase girls' participation rates. A commissioned study by the Robert Wood Johnson commission identified that lack of community involvement, program sustainability, and family engagement were major barriers that limit and prevent participation in physical activity for minority children, resulting in disparate child outcomes. Other research has suggested a link between poverty and area of residence influences physical activity participation, but called for investigation of this trend in other communities.

The primary goal of this project is to forge new connections and create synergy among U of M researchers, the Tucker Center for Girls & Women in Sport, the Melpomene Institute, and community members in the Twin Cities Metro Area in order to identify barriers and antecedents that prevent and limit girls' participation in physical activity within their communities. Results will be used to make policy recommendations to community members and sport leaders that may increase culturally relevant opportunities for physical activity in ethnic minority girls, and increase awareness of such opportunities through culturally appropriate social marketing.

Because of the action agenda for reform imbedded in the research, the research project design will be delineated using an advocacy/participatory approach through conducting action research. Both quantitative and qualitative methods will be employed in data collection to provide the information necessary to aid in the creation of policy that may change the lives of ethnic minority girls. From grounded theory perspective, eight focus groups, consisting of five East African girls (ages of 10 to 14) in each group acting as "informants", will discuss their "situated knowledge", experiences, perceptions, and ideas for making physical activity more accessible, safe, and equitable to ethnic minority girls in the Twin Cities Metro Area. The over-arching goal of this project is ultimately reduce the disparities in health and well-being outcomes for ethnic minority girls that currently exist.