

Viewing the body as a temple: Exploring motivators and barriers to improving obesity related health behaviors in African American faith communities

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Purpose of Focus Groups

Seven focus groups, one with church leaders and six with African American women, were conducted with churches in an urban, low-income, primarily ethnic minority area in Dallas, TX. The purpose of the focus groups was to determine the perspectives of church leaders and church members on weight loss and maintaining a healthy lifestyle to guide the development of a faith-enhanced Diabetes Prevention Program including:

- current needs of church members trying to reach a healthy weight
- **perceptions (e.g. beliefs, values, knowledge and attitudes) regarding the connection between faith and healthy lifestyle**
- barriers that prevent weight loss
- facilitators and motivators of weight management
- delivery preferences for church weight management programs

This presentation focuses primarily on the themes related to faith and health.

Participant Demographics

Participants included 53 congregation members and 11 pastors and first ladies.

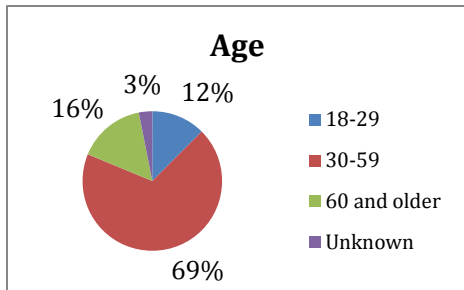


Figure A: Ages

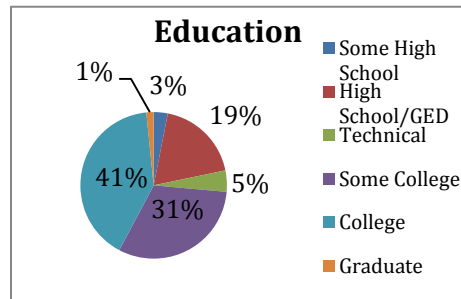


Figure B: Education

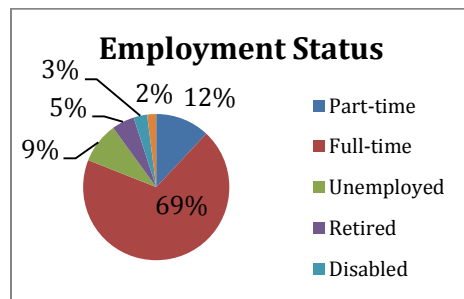


Figure C: Employment Status

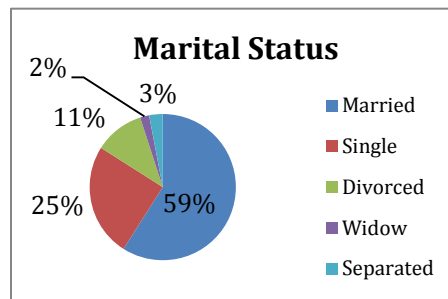


Figure D: Marital Status

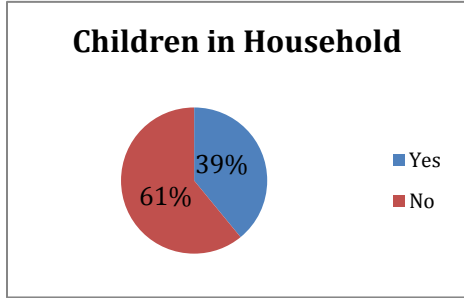


Figure E: Children in Household

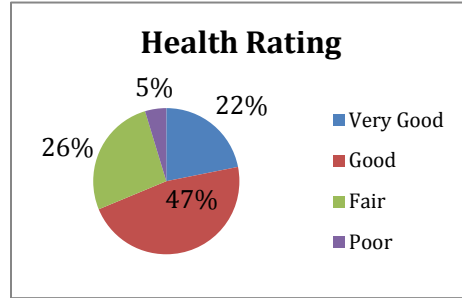


Figure F: Health Rating

Focus Group Questions

Questions were developed using the Social Ecological Framework to understand weight loss and maintenance from an individual, family, church, social and environmental perspective. The questions in bold identify the targeted faith questions.

Table 1. Focus Group Questions

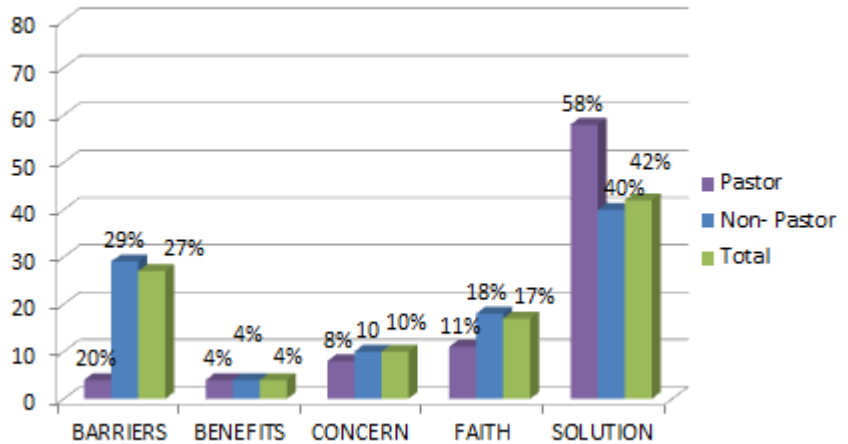
<p>Core Questions</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How concerned are you about obesity in your <u>community, church, family, and for yourself</u>? 2. How important is it to reach and maintain a healthy weight to you? 3. How do you think weight influences one’s health? 4. How does a healthy lifestyle influence one’s health? 5. How important do you think faith is in achieving overall health? 6. What is God’s role in your health and having a healthy weight? 7. How does your faith in God help or improve your health? 8. What role should the church play in promoting health? 9. Knowing that with God all things are possible and that He is the Provider of all things what is it that would be needed for you to reach and maintain a healthy weight/healthy lifestyle?
<p>Topical Questions: Pastor- Specific Questions</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What role should the Pastor/First Lady serve in promoting health? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. What can you do to encourage living a healthy lifestyle in your congregation? 2. What should program developers know if they were to create a weight management program for your church? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. What role the Pastor/First Lady play in the program? b. How should the program be sustained? 3. What do you think we should take into account when developing a program where Pastors deliver program materials to their congregation members? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Do you think Pastor involvement is necessary for a program to be successful? b. What are the strengths and barriers of this plan? c. How can we overcome or reduce those barriers? d. What should the expectations about the role of the Pastor be?

Results

Emerging Themes

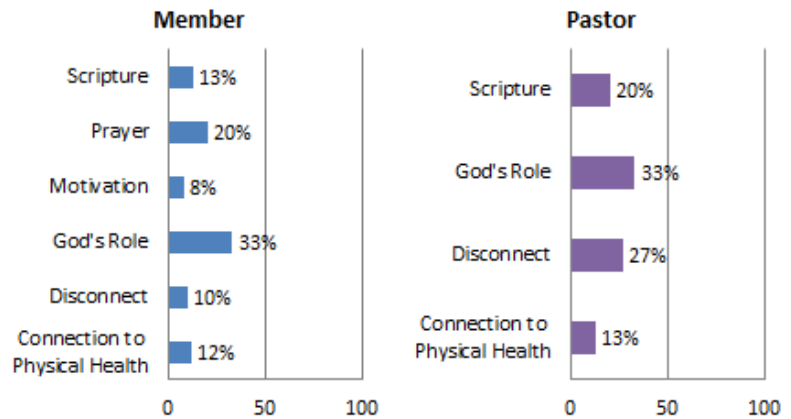
Among the 7 focus groups, recordings were transcribed and coded using classic content analysis with NVIVO 10 software. There were five primary themes:

- Faith
- Barriers
- Benefits
- Concerns
- Solutions



Faith:

Faith was discussed in multiple ways including beliefs, the role of God, use of prayer and scripture, and the role of the church within the perspectives of how faith impacts health and well-being. Faith included thoughts, beliefs, spiritual practices or actions. The charts below show the frequency of coding for the dominant sub-codes within Faith.



God's role in health and weight loss was the main sub category of faith mentioned. Individuals described the role of God as:

- Helper and Provider- God gives direction for the day or guidance and empowers you to change
- Healer, enables you to become healthy
- Creator-In control of all things/Knows the future and present
- Trustworthy and able to increase faith and belief
- Giver of strength, persevere, and motivation
- Counselor- reminds you of things that need to change in your life or areas of disobedience (not treating your body as a “temple”);
- Cares for you and loves you- carries your burdens and supports you through them

“So, what made me think about that with this scripture came back to me again recently was - you want to do so many things, you want to do these things for your health, you want to look better, you want to feel better, but you're not acknowledging Him any. Because if He is the God of paying bills or raising the dead or making sure your relationship is good and all that, He is the God of simple just eating or what to choose or what to eat”

...I need to put it at the throne and really ask for help and guidance in so many different areas with my health. And, I know that it's gonna be there. But it's gonna be up to me to stop that fork...it's gotta be up to me...to stop it...and I know He will give me the help if I have the will to start stopping it. I think that He will help me along. I just gotta get there. - C 21

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Prayer was described by participants as talking to or communicating with God. It is a tool or resource to use to help live a healthy lifestyle or when trying to improve health. Prayer involves:

- Ask and receive help and guidance; Increases belief, and gives strength and motivation
- Exercise increases prayer life or times of prayer

We just – it's not that – we know that God is everywhere, we know that He is omnipresent, we know that is omniscient, we know that he is omnipotent. We know this. As believe[r]s we know this. We recognize it. But, what we fail to do – I believe – is we fail to reach out to him through prayer and study of the Word.....to include him.....in everything. - FC 12

...You've got to do it. So, I just pray. I have to be prayerful in my workout because I'm not an athlete...and I'm not in the best shape. And so, whatever I'm doing, I have to be prayerful to God that He shows me through it. In answer to your question, I rely on my faith a lot when I'm working out. T-4

Disconnect refers to a disassociation of faith with health and health behaviors or between what we know and what we do. Pastors and First Ladies mentioned Disconnect more often than other participants as a prominent subtheme. Including:

- Knowing what scripture says, but not applying it to faith
- Being fatalistic about health (“when the Lord takes me, he takes me”)

I was going to say, honestly, when I think about my love for God and I know that that's in the Word - I've read it myself, not just listen to the preacher - but that's an area that I truly, truly struggle in - but I love God ...you know, it's almost like I separate the two....Some people don't though. They got the revelation of it. I don't have it yet...Because if I did, to me, I would be on conscious of defiling my body by not exercising, and wanting to just, I gotta have something sweet on a daily basis.... You know what I mean. Like, I'm wondering...I don't have the revelation...yet in this part of my life. But I know that I love the Lord. I know that I love God. And so... ..I think it's different times the light bulb come on...for you in different areas in the Word and it's not preached about a lot....

Scripture- refers to someone talking about the Bible (also called “the Word”), quoting a verse from the bible or referring to the practice of reading and applying parts of the bible to your life. Examples include:

- Reference to dietary laws or commands regarding food, or examples of people who ate differently
- “Your body is a temple”- most repeated scripture reference quoting 1 Corinthians 6: 19-20. Refers to taking care of your body because humans are made in the image of God, God cares for people, and the belief that the Holy Spirit resides in believers.

Then, I also love the scripture that “I am fearfully and wonderfully made”....So...the other part of faith is, when you start to study the scripture, or when I started to study the scripture, to know that “I am fearfully and wonderfully made” and that this body is His temple...it's His, you know, representation...then I definitely had to say “Okay, everything I am doing with this body...it needs to be pleasing to him”, and if it's not pleasing to him, then I need to make the change. And, I have made the change.

And, I think is important to...umm - you know, we use the scripture “I can do all things...” but, you now if we want to lose weight, you know, we will use the scripture or use the Word to know that “He is with us. He will never leave us nor forsake us.” If it is a goal that we want to set, we can pull from our faith. We can walk on it. We can stand on it to know that “God, you are going to get me through this”.

Connection to Physical Health- refers to how participants viewed the connection of their faith to their physical health.

- Spiritual health leads to physical health, and visa versa
- Practice of religion impacts the decisions made about the body/health

Yeah. Faith kind of does, because like she said, we're all believers, we're children of God. Like XX was saying, I kind of feel like that because I...I like me and I like, you know, God created me just like I am. I don't have to be a stick to be okay or acceptable. And, maybe that's how it works. I'm fine with

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what the Lord has given me and I just need to work it and use it in good manner. Some as you get older, you make better choices. Like I say – I don't so this, but cut back or I do that. That's because this is the temple. I'm not perfect. I'm not going to do everything right on. But, that's kind of part of it. God created me, I'm His child, and this is just...I need to kind of keep it and do what He asked me to do in perspective. Don't be foolish. I just can be a fool and the Lord has given me this. Just 'cause it's good today, if I don't treat it right, tomorrow it won't be good. So, faith is a part of that because I know the Lord, I trust the Lord, but I like what He gave – you know, this is how he put me together. It may not be one everyone else says it should be put together. But I like – this is what I have. So, I still have to consciously make good decisions.

Motivation- refers to aspects and beliefs within an individual's spiritual life that promote feelings of motivation and encouragement.

- Salvation and the way's God has worked to help people in their lives leading to deeper trust in God
- Knowing God cares for you and is concerned about your health leads to a desire to please God

For me, it would be learning to rely on Him. Learning to allow Him.... (cough) excuse me...to work it out. When you don't have that motivation or that person is telling you, "You can't do", "Why are you doing it", "You're fine", or trying to un motivate you...to look to Him and allow Him to keep your mind straight. Allow Him to know that...it's not - He's trying to cleanse you. He's trying to cleanse your body. He's trying to take you to another level and you have to allow Him.

...and so, when we are not getting the motivation we need or the encouragement we need, then He is definitely a "Keeper", as my mother-in-law has always told me...whether I wanted to hear it or not (laughter)...but definitely a keeper, because, he just reassures us...it's that small, still voice or that quiet voice when everybody else is being loud and negative. He's the one saying "You can do it". You know? So, a keeper and a motivator.

Implications

This information shows that there are significant areas where faith can be utilized to help improve health behaviors. Some things to take away are:

For Pastors:

- Pastors need more education in health so that they can help congregation members make connections between their faith and health. In addition they need capable and willing leaders who are already or desire to be health champions to come alongside them and manage health programs. Pastors can be promoters and help to preach sermon that focus on health, but they cannot be the sole leader of health in their congregations.
- Draw connections between spiritual health and physical health

For health researchers:

- Work within pastor partnerships to make connections to health, and build programs to combat chronic diseases, and fatalistic attitudes of some church-goers
- Faith is a motivator for health behavior change
- Recognize the importance of faith in women's lives, it often is consuming their schedule. Be deliberate about connecting the benefits of health in faith communities- ability to serve people and serve God better, taking care of your temple, longevity, honoring God though taking care of your body

Contact Information

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