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The Church Bridge Project: An Academic–Community Perspective of a Church-Based Weight Management Pilot Intervention among Young Adult African Americans

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What Is the Purpose of this Study/Review?

- The Church Bridge Project was a community-driven and church-based weight management program that included a partnership between the University of Southern Mississippi, three Stone County churches, and the Mississippi State University Extension Services.
- In 2016, program planning and development began and was guided by an executive team of pastor-appointed church leaders, university faculty, and extension service faculty. We used church and outpatient primary care facilities and resources for participant recruitment.
- The purpose of this study was to examine the feasibility of delivering a church-based intervention to reduce obesity and related chronic disease disparities in rural, African American young adults.

What Is the Problem?

- Community-based participatory research facilitates the research process among populations who mistrust medical and/or academic institutions. The difficulties and challenges of community-based methods in communities new to or relatively untouched by research need to be further described and considered.

What Are the Findings?

- Churches are effective at recruiting a sample of young adult African Americans who are similar to the overall target population.
- Commitment to church-based health programs remains an issue.
- Primary care providers were difficult to work with to recruit minority patients into a church-based weight management program.

Who Should Care Most?

- Partners involved in community-based partnerships to improve community health.
- Researchers engaged in community-based participatory and church-based research.
- Primary care physicians and offices.

Recommendations for Action

- Church leaders are effective at reaching young adults.

- More flexible means of participant management (e.g., the use of mobile or web-based technology) may be required to facilitate enrollment and orientation for research studies.
- Project teams should support program coordinators who understand the research process and work well with communities to maintain forward motion of project activities.
- There are great challenges in working with primary care providers for health intervention research which may suggest that policies supporting the reimbursement of community-driven weight management programs are warranted.
- Before a partnership begins and as it progresses, the continuum of community-based partnerships should be discussed and partners should examine how they envision themselves contributing to the decision making for the research process.