

Building a Healthy Temple

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study aimed to qualitatively explore the Hispanic faith-based communities' perceptions and willingness to address the childhood obesity epidemic. We will gain insights on faith-based communities' perceptions of childhood obesity; their openness and willingness to address the issue of childhood obesity; their perceived barriers and facilitators to implementing faith-based community obesity prevention programs; and their ideas of appropriate obesity interventions in faith-based community settings. **Methods:** In-depth interviews with 30 Hispanic church leaders and 7 focus groups with 38 church attending Hispanic children and 38 parents in San Antonio's West Side, a low-income Hispanic community, were used to collect qualitative data. Interviews and focus groups were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. Qualitative analysis was sequential, utilizing a combination of editing and immersion crystallization. Pertinent research findings will be disseminated to policy makers, community groups and health professionals through town hall meetings, community forums, conference presentation and publications. **Results:** Preliminary Findings demonstrated that Hispanic faith-based communities are aware of the burning issues associated with obesity and its consequences, such as diabetes and hypertension, affecting their congregations. Both church leaders and members showed willingness to address childhood obesity in faith-based community settings. They perceived a relationship between ones' faith and health. They identified the needs for culturally sensitive health education through sermons and Sunday school, free after-school activities or a summer camp providing physical activity opportunities for both parents and children, healthy cooking classes, church and home food environmental changes, as well as congregation-wide healthy competition. **Conclusions:** This study suggested that Hispanic faith-based communities in San Antonio are aware of and willing to address childhood obesity among their congregations. Implementation of future childhood obesity programs through the Hispanic faith-based community is worthy of investigation in the future.

KEYWORDS: Child, Obesity, Spirituality, Hispanic Americans, Prevention,
Qualitative Research