

Summary of outcomes for Faithful Footsteps: A faith-based physical activity intervention for Hispanics

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Background & Rationale for Study: Currently, Latinos have among the lowest rates of leisure time physical activity (PA) of any ethnic/racial group in the United States, regardless of social class. Regular PA has many benefits, including improvements to both mental and physical health. Using a faith-based setting to increase PA allows for targeting this specific audience in a convenient and familiar environmental context.

Research Design: *Faithful Footsteps* was a 6-month pilot program to increase PA among Latinos using a faith-based approach. Using a group-randomized control design, one church was assigned to an attention control group and two churches were assigned to the intervention group. Culturally and spiritually relevant materials in English and in Spanish were developed for both groups. A volunteer sample of participants from the control church (n = 23) and intervention churches (n = 24) took part in the assessment portion of the project, though intervention activities were available to all members of the churches. Exposure to intervention materials, church level health variables, knowledge of PA recommendations and benefits, and exposure to intervention activities were assessed.

Intervention Materials: These materials included information on how PA benefits cardiovascular disease, diabetes, mental health, and cancer, information linking Catholic saints to PA and healthy lifestyles, and holding a walking contest using pedometers to track daily steps. Finally, a health fiesta promoting healthy foods, dancing and physically active games concluded the intervention. As an alternative to PA promotion, general health materials were developed for the control group. Topics included cardiovascular disease, diabetes, work safety, immunization and mental health. This was also concluded by a traditional health fiesta.

Results: Those participating in assessments were mostly female (55%), middle-aged (43.9±11.1yrs), and of Mexican ancestry (76.1%). Only 27% of participants reported seeing intervention materials, but 69% reported having a priest/other church official speak to the materials, about health in general, or about PA, specifically. Most (66%) of intervention participants were able to identify health reasons for participating in PA, and 47% described current public health PA guidelines.

Conclusions: This study provides formative research for the development of larger faith-based PA interventions targeting Latinos. Future directions include dissemination of the PA intervention to other churches with large Latino congregations.

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