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A Collaborative Partnership with Churches to Reduce Health Disparities Among African Americans in Rural Communities

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Rural Health Disparity Risk Factors

- Geographic Isolation
- Lower Socio-economic status
- Higher rates of health risk behaviors
- Limited job opportunities
- Higher rates of chronic illness
- Poor overall health



The Southeast Rural Georgia

- Bulloch County – consist of four rural communities
- Significant challenges include poverty, obesity, diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease
- Obesity among non-Hispanic blacks is 37% compared 28% of entire Georgians.

	Bulloch County	State of Georgia	
Population	71,000	9,992,167	
• White	67%	62%	
• Black	29%	31%	
• Hispanic	4%	9%	
• Other	2%	4%	



Bulloch County Statistics

	County	Georgia
Median Income	\$21,897	\$47,289
Unemployment	8.1%	5.8%
Adult Diabetes	9.2%	10.4%
Adult Obesity	29.2%	27.2%
Overweight	28.6%	33.6%
Health & Nutrition	49.6%	48%
General Health	59%	55.2%
Mode of Transportation	Driving	
Most Common Occupations	Food preparation & serving related occupations	

Minority Health Statistics

- African Americans are twice as likely as whites to have diabetes.
- Hispanics are 1.7 times as likely as whites to have diabetes. Hispanics are also 1.5 times as likely as whites to die from diabetes.
- American Indians and Alaska Natives are twice as likely as non-Hispanic whites of similar age to have diabetes.
- African Americans are 1.4 times as likely as whites to have high blood pressure.
- African Americans are much more likely than people in other racial/ethnic groups to die from heart disease and stroke.
- African Americans are 20 percent more likely to report having serious psychological distress than non-Hispanic whites are. ¹¹

Background

- Health disparities related to heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, and obesity continue to remain **high** in the African-American community compared to other groups in the U.S.
- African Americans living in rural and medically underserved areas are at an **even higher** risk for these conditions.
- Increasing numbers of health organizations have **successfully partnered** with black churches to reduce the gap in health disparities in the black community.



The Role of Church

- The history of the black church indicates it has served as a **strong, consistent, and influential** contributor to economic, political, and social development in minority neighborhoods.
- The church has often acted as the **facilitator** through the development of educational and cultural programs.
- Within the African American community, the church is seen as a **healing place** where broken lives, spirits, and bodies are mended.



Recognizing the Need

- Creating Academic and Community Partnerships
- The Process
- Identifying the Community Leaders



Collaborative Partnership Readiness

- **Goal:** To promote sustainable healthy behaviors to reduce health risks among African American families using Church and Academics
- Education of the issue
- Community Readiness to take Action
- Available Resources to Address the Issue



Purpose

- **Preliminary study**
 - Georgia Southern University partnered with **6** African American Church clergies in rural communities to:
 - identify the **health needs** of its congregation
 - develop appropriate **health promotion education** to improve health outcomes for families with chronic disease.
 - The **research questions** explored were:
 - (1) What are the identified chronic diseases and the health concerns of African Americans of rural black churches?
 - (2) Do these identified chronic diseases correlate with the national health disparity statistics among African-Americans?



(Raffles Medical Group)

Methods / Results

- Data were collected from **73** black participants;
 - majority were **51 years and older** (60%); **female** (84.6%), and only 7.7% rated their health as excellent.
- The top five **chronic diseases** or health challenges were identified as:
 - high blood pressure (50.7%)
 - diabetes (23.3%)
 - overweight/obesity (42.5%)
 - high cholesterol (16.4%)
 - heart disease (12.3%)
- With respect to **healthy living** and lifestyle, findings indicated:
 - only 32.9% exercise at least three times a week,
 - 45% eat fast food more than once per week,
 - 27.4% receive flu shot each year,
 - 11% eat at least 5 servings of fruits and vegetables per day.
- The study was **IRB approved**, and participation was **voluntary**.



(Robert Brown/LinkedIn)

Implications for Rural Health

- These findings have implications for **quality of life** of vulnerable populations in rural community settings.
- Findings indicate the promising role of the church in addressing health disparities is **essential** to improve health outcomes in the African American community.
- A **collaborative** partnership with the churches to identify appropriate program design and delivery that are essential for recruitment, participation, and sustainability is **crucial**.
- Health interventions that incorporate **spiritual and cultural** contexts may be more effective and produce significant results on health behaviors of African Americans in rural communities.



(Baycrest)



(EmCare)

Research Team

- Research Team
 - Nurses
 - Health Promotion Educator
 - Nutritionist
 - Statistician
 - Measurement Expert
 - Six Pastors
 - IT
- NIH Grant



Future Development / Plans

- The Research team is planning to use a **community-based participatory** approach to enhance individual and family health by improving:
 - physical, mental, family, and spiritual health, parameters.
- Health/illness **interventions** will address:
 - **diet, exercise, motivation, faith, and family involvement** in health to reduce risk from obesity and related conditions (diabetes, hypertension, and other chronic illnesses), and improve family and spiritual health across the lifespan.



(Outbound)



(Bitescience)

Lessons Learned

- Create and maintain a culture of collaboration
- Establish positions, agree of specified outcomes
- Determine the roles to help achieve outcomes
- Maintain open ongoing communication with partners
- Make use of various partners' expertise and accommodate their respective limitations
- Plan for long-term sustainability



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