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# Physical activity social support and middle- and older-aged minority women: results from a US survey

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## Abstract

**Background:** Many American adults remain sedentary despite many known health benefits. Research on the determinants of physical activity have indicated that social support is one of the strongest correlates, but little is known about this relation in important subgroups of middle and older-aged women.

**Objective:** The purpose of this study was to assess the association of physical activity-related social support on several measures of physical activity in a national sample of minority women. A unique aspect of these measures is the inclusion of vigorous household tasks and occupational physical activities.

**Methods:** The US Women's Determinants Study was conducted in 1996–1997. The survey was a modified-random sample telephone survey of 2912 Black Hispanic

survey was a multistage random sample, telephone survey of 2712 Black, Hispanic, American Indian/Alaskan Native, and White women age 40 and older. A composite score of physical activity social support (PASS) was analyzed as the independent variable in logistic regression analyses. Four measures of physical activity levels served as the dependent variables. A separate analysis was done to distinguish PASS from friends versus PASS from relatives. The potential confounding effect of race/ethnicity, marital status, age, income and education were evaluated and adjusted in the models.

**Results:** Hispanic women were more likely to have high PASS scores than the other racial/ethnic groups. Odds ratios indicate that subjects with high levels of PASS were significantly less likely to be sedentary than those with low support, even after adjusting for race/ethnicity. While there were significant associations among levels of social support and physical activity, this was not true for the measure of "regular exercise." There was no significant difference between the contribution of "friend" support versus "family" support on all four measures on physical activity.

**Discussion:** Based on our results, enhancing social support may be an important aspect of interventions aimed at increasing physical activity in a population of sedentary women of various racial/ethnic backgrounds. Also, "regular exercisers" in this population appear to be less reliant social support to maintain their behavior.



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## Keywords

Physical activity; Social support; Minority; Women

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