

American Indian Perceptions of Obesity and Its Effects on Healthy Lifestyles

Morgan J Foster
Walden University

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Study Introduction

- Tribal Nation's Research Group approval
- Tribal Council resolution
- Walden University Institutional Review Board approval
- Great Plains Institutional Review Board approval (Aberdeen, SD)

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Background

- Obesity is now considered a disease
- 1 in 5 deaths attributed to obesity
- Higher incidence among American Indians
 - 1.6 times more likely to be obese
- Approximately 42.3% of American Indians age 18 and older are considered obese
 - 15% higher than comparison (White) group

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Purpose of the Study

- To determine culture-specific views of obesity
 - Is obesity perceived as a problem?
- To contribute to the knowledge base of obesity specifically for American Indians
 - Provide information to create culture specific health education programs

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Study Significance

- Fill the gap in qualitative knowledge
- Provide information to local agencies
- Identify possible factors that could influence obesity
- Recommendations for the development of intervention strategies
- Ability for participants to personally say what they "feel" or "think" about obesity
- Provide social change

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Research Design and Rationale

- Qualitative ethnographic approach
 - Culture specific opinions, attitudes, beliefs, views
 - Focus groups and key-informant interviews
- Convenience sampling
- Target N of 38 (range of 35-40)

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Scope

- Scope
 - Members of the local reservation under study
 - Males and females age 18 and older
 - American Indian Heritage

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Research Questions

- How do American Indians perceive a healthy weight or body mass index?
- How do American Indians perceive being overweight or obese?
- How do American Indians perceive obesity as an influence, if any, on healthy lifestyles?
- How do culturally-driven beliefs contribute to behaviors that relate to being overweight or obese?

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Focus Groups

- Expert panel consulted
- Two male focus groups
- Two female focus groups
- Retirement Home
 - Permission granted from the Director
- Community Health Representatives (CHR)
 - Permission granted from the Director

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Key-Informant Interviews

- Five key-informant interviews
 - Tribal Council Member
 - Tribal Diabetes Office Director
 - Tribal Health Educator
 - Retired Vice President of the tribal community college
 - Retired Health Administrator

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Instrumentation

- Focus group interview guide
 - 16 open-ended questions
- Key-informant interview guide
 - 10 open-ended questions

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Results

- 30 participants (79%)
 - Retirement Home participants: 7 women, 7 men
 - CHR participants: 6 women, 5 men
 - 5 Key-Informants
- Manual coding
 - Over 300 pages of transcripts
 - Pens and highlighters
- In-vivo coding
 - Is often used in studies that honor the participants' voice by applying a single word or short phrase to summarize key ideas within a passage in terms used directly by the participants (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

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Research Question 1

- How do American Indians perceive a healthy weight or body mass index?
 - Self-perceived appearance
 - Healthy weight perceptions
 - Self-acceptance

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Research Question 1

- Examples:
 - “as long as I feel good, that’s the most important”
 - “the way you look at yourself”
 - “you got to feel comfortable in your own skin”
 - “I know I’m overweight, got pants that I can’t button up”
 - “I don’t look obese, I am obese”
 - “being able to get up and walk”
 - “got to be happy with yourself”
 - “mentally you have to be healthy”
 - “I think it’s how you feel. I was skinny all my life, I think I am overweight now. I feel healthy.”

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Research Question 2

- How do American Indians perceive being overweight or obese?
 - Poverty
 - Boredom due to unemployment
 - Physical inactivity

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Research Question 2

- Examples:
 - “their carts are filled with pizzas”
 - “a lot of people won’t work and they’re doing nothing”
 - “I think they’re just bored and all they do is eat”
 - “grew up on a farm so we were always busy”
 - “they get too lazy now, they’re not doing hard work”
 - “worst food for you is the cheapest”
 - “kids don’t go outside, they’re inside playing video games”
 - “younger generation do not want to cook”
 - “it’s a personal thing”
 - “our ancestors had it better off than we do, they were healthy people”

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Research Question 3

- How do American Indians perceive obesity as an influence, if any, on healthy lifestyles?
 - Poverty
 - Physical inactivity
 - Unhealthy choices/behaviors
 - Dietary habits/choices
 - Overwhelming feeling of hopelessness
 - Community leadership and support
 - Parental education

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Research Question 3

- Examples:
 - “I think a lot of it has to do if you can afford to eat”
 - “drugs and alcohol is terrible”
 - “most of us are looking to the tribal council and they don’t follow through so why should we”
 - “you have no money, you can’t eat”
 - “the parents need to push their kids to make something happen for them, you’ve got to be the parent”
 - “get outside and play”
 - “what’s important now is technology”
 - “I don’t see the family sitting down and eating together”
 - “too many microwave cooks”
 - “we need to change the mindset of ‘they’ve done nothing for me’ and look at the positive things around you versus the negative”

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Research Question 4

– How do culturally-driven beliefs contribute to behaviors that relate to being overweight or obese?

- Cultural importance of food
- Traditional food production
- Convenience foods and absence of home cooking
- Culture change
- Identity shift

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Research Question 4

– Examples:

- “a lot of people keep away from the American Indian heritage cause they say they’re mixed blood”
- “they used to do a lot of walking way back when, I think that was healthy”
- “bullets and bangs”
- “hunting”
- “fishing”
- “Mother Earth will provide”
- “parents should be more involved in getting their kids to do more activities”
- “we should be able to go into schools as Elders and teach our children”
- “see one thing you’ll find in our culture is pretty much everything revolves around food”

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Data Contributions To:

- Public health
- American Indian community studies
- Qualitative research
- Methodology

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Social Change Implication

- Agencies from all disciplines that provide American Indians with care will have key information for educating community members, staff, and employees on how to improve the quality of care for American Indians
- Potential to influence current Tribal Council members, along with the community, to create or implement interventions aimed at addressing participant concerns through strategic planning
- Enable members to understand the negativity of these concerns and how they could affect their lives

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Recommendations

- Cultural revitalization
 - The concept of revitalization has been documented for many years and is defined as “a deliberate, organized, conscious effort by members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture” (Wallace, 1956 p. 265).
 - Revitalization movements are a way to allow certain groups (i.e. cultural, political, religious) “to be delivered from deprivation and return to their traditional cultural values” (White, 2009 p. 156).
- Health fair put on by local tribal high schoolers
- Parenting education
- Community-wide strategic plan
- Conduct future research

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Concerns

- Health will get worse (diabetes)
- People will be dying younger due to diabetes
- Fewer health resources available due to diabetes
- Drugs continue to be a priority
- “Something needs to be done”

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Conclusions

- Obesity was **not** considered a health concern affecting healthy lifestyles
- American Indian people are disproportionately affected by factors that are, for the most part, out of their control

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Current Efforts

- Dr. Carol A. Davis

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Thank you.
Questions?

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Walden University

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