

2022

Role of Socioeconomic Status and Obesity in African American Adults

Alexis Bryant
Old Dominion University

Laura Christian
Old Dominion University

Naomi Mcleod
Old Dominion University

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Recommended Citation

Bryant, Alexis; Christian, Laura; and Mcleod, Naomi, "Role of Socioeconomic Status and Obesity in African American Adults" (2022). *College of Health Sciences Posters*. 3.
https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/gradposters2022_healthsciences/3

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Abstract

African Americans have a higher prevalence of obesity compared to any other racial/ethnic group due to a variety of factors. This display presents a literature review revealing the impact socioeconomic status has on obesity among the African American adult population in Virginia. In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of this public health issue, the risk factors, risk behaviors, and health outcomes surrounding obesity were also examined.

Background

Virginia is one of the country's lead states in obesity rates for African American adults accounting for 32.2 %. These alarming rates stem from several socioeconomic factors that heavily impact an individual's lifestyle. The type of lifestyle an individual lives affects their chances of experiencing unemployment, poverty, food insecurity, and participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Studies suggest that as unemployment and poverty levels rise, obesity rates increase as well (Griffith, 2011).

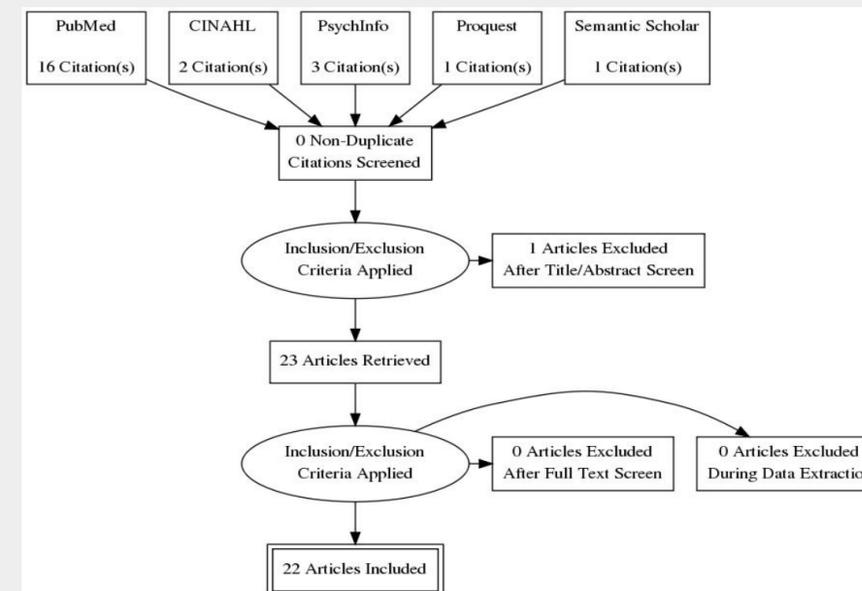
Methods

- A systematic literature search was produced and completed by utilizing the following databases: PubMed, CINAHL Plus, PsycINFO, Cochrane, and EBSCOhost. The search concentrated on four key concepts surrounding obesity: risk factors, risk behaviors, socioeconomic status, and health outcomes.
- Additionally, all related studies were chosen if they: (1) were observational studies; (2) stated the prevalence and assessed the individual, psychological, and/or behavioral risk factors regarding obesity; and (3) were published in peer-reviewed journals in the English language.
- The study followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) flowchart as a guide for proper selection of the relevant articles.

Results

- The search yielded 22 articles (16 PubMed, 2 CINAHL, 2 PsychInfo, 1 Proquest, 1 Semantic Scholar), 0 of which were not found to be duplicates.
- A total of 23 articles were screened for eligibility, and only 22 were determined to be eligible, as shown in Figure 1. The reasons for the exclusion of article (N=1) included irrelevant title and abstract information.
- A total of 22 eligible articles were included in the systematic review. The search yielded a mixture of observational, cross-sectional, case-control, and cohort studies, as well as secondary data analyses based on the inclusion criteria.

Figure 1. Selection Process for Including Studies in the Systematic Review and Meta-analysis of Prevalence in Accordance with PRISMA Flowchart.



Results showed there is a positive correlation between socioeconomic status and obesity in the United States. Key findings indicate certain health behaviors, such as unhealthy eating, physical inactivity and lack of sleep increase the chances of an individual becoming obese. Not only does indulging in these harmful activities pose as a high risk, but other health outcomes may arise as a result of being obese, such as a reduced life expectancy, cancer, and diabetes.

Findings

Risk factors & Health Behaviors Impacting Obesity

- Research has indicated that African Americans are more susceptible to consuming unhealthy foods compared with individuals in other ethnic groups (Ivanic, 2016).
- Multiple studies implied that limited access to environmental resources, individual attitudes surrounding physical activity, one's eating habits, exposure to stress, as well as the quantity and quality of sleep duration may be primarily due to the role of fundamental gaps in one's socioeconomic position (Cuevas et al., 2020).

Health outcomes

- Annual costs of being obese is approximately \$4,879 for an obese woman and \$2,646 for an obese man (Chang et al., 2017).
- Obesity is responsible for \$61.8 billion in Medicare and Medicaid spending. According to the American Cancer Society, an estimated 5% of all cancer cases in men and 11% in women can be attributed to excess body weight (Lauby-Secretan et al., 2016).
- Research indicates that people with diagnosable mental health disorders like depression are at an increased risk of cardiovascular disease, as well as experiencing other physical conditions due to a higher prevalence of inadequate attention to modifiable risk factors like being overweight/obese (Lincoln et al., 2014).

Conclusions

- Further examination is needed to serve as a foundation for creating preventative strategies for this population.
- Researchers can utilize the findings provided from this literature review to help decrease the obesity rates among African American adults in the U.S. and The Commonwealth of Virginia.
- Future literature and systematic reviews could be helpful to clinicians' for developing programming and interventions to support individuals who are affected by obesity.
- Several systemic changes are needed to support those facing low socioeconomic status such as introducing a livable income, producing recreation centers despite location/environment, accessibility to healthy grocery stores, as well as increase health literacy and education.

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