South Carolina Researchers Examine Church Leaders' Barriers and Facilitators Before and After Implementing a Physical Activity and Nutrition Intervention

A team of researchers in the [Prevention Research Center](#) at the University of South Carolina's [Arnold School of Public Health](#) have published a study on church leaders' barriers and facilitators before and after implementing a physical activity and nutrition intervention. Their paper was included in [Health Education Research](#).

Faith-based health promotion programs have been effective in increasing healthy eating and physical activity. However, very few reports exist regarding church leaders' anticipated and experienced barriers and facilitators to program implementation.

In this study, pastors (n = 38, 70%) and coordinators (n = 54, 100%) from 54 churches who attended a program training answered open-ended questions about anticipated barriers and facilitators to implementing the healthy eating and physical activity parts of the Faith, Activity, and Nutrition (FAN) program. Twelve months later, pastors (n = 49, 92%) and coordinators (n = 53, 98%) from these same churches answered analogous questions about their experienced barriers and facilitators to implementing the healthy eating and physical activity parts of the FAN program.

The researchers coded their responses using thematic analysis. Similar themes appeared at baseline and follow-up for anticipated and experienced barriers and facilitators.

While the most common response to perceived and experienced barriers was that there were no barriers, the most common barriers were resistance to change among members, church characteristics (including facilities and characteristics of members), and lack of participation/motivation. The most common facilitators were internal support, leadership, and communication.

The authors found few differences between anticipated and experienced barriers and facilitators. They note that understanding these perspectives, particularly overcoming resistance to change and church characteristics through strong leadership and internal support from church leaders, will improve future program development, resources, and technical assistance in faith-based and non-faith-based communities alike.