



WOMEN WHO WALK TOGETHER

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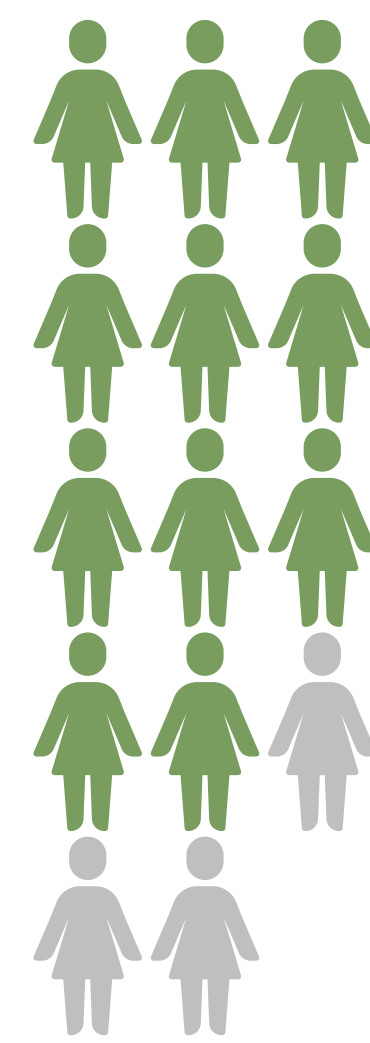
Purpose

Louisiana has some of the lowest rates of physical activity in the United States (ranking 46 out of 50, with an inactivity rate of 30.8%) and these rates are even lower for women. Understanding what motivates women to engage in physical activity can help researchers and public health practitioners address inactivity in this population. The purpose of this study is to describe **walking group behaviors, facilitators and barriers for women who live small towns (less than 5,000) and consistently exercise with a partner.**

Methods

Women were recruited through local Extension SNAP-Ed agents in 4 counties with high adult obesity rates (35-42%). **Inclusion criteria:** ≥18 years old, walking with a partner at least once a week for a minimum of 2 months. Due to COVID-19, women were given the option to complete the interview over Zoom, outdoors, or distanced with masks indoors. **Seven interviews** were completed, with a total of **14 participants**, as well as a demographic intake form and informed consent. Interview recordings were transcribed and coded for like themes.

Results



11 Black women
3 White women
ages 33-77 (mean 54.2)

Themes

Accountability
Encouragement from walking partner

Barriers: **lack of sidewalks, traffic**

Facilitators: parks with **walking trails** and personal concerns about **chronic diseases**

Outcome

In one community, the interviews resulted in a new shared use policy, which opens the only high school track in the county for community use before and after school.

"And I'm finding myself, I'm back to myself, and exercise is helping me get there...Family is helping me get there. You know what I'm saying? You're not alone, you know?"

Conclusions

Social support is critical for maintaining physical activity habits among women in small towns. A walking partner was viewed as essential for maintaining consistency and remaining motivated. Promoting ways to meet other women to walk together through community partnerships, local libraries, or faith communities could be a low cost-way to increase physical activity levels in women living in small towns.

