

Black men place family and community above their own health

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(Medical Xpress) -- Black men place a higher priority on fulfilling social roles such as family provider, father, husband and community member than they do on physical activity—and their health suffers because they don't often find time for both.

A new study from the University of Michigan School of Public Health looks at why many African-American men aren't more physically active.

"This is our most important paper to date, because the findings underpin all of our other research on African American men's health behaviors. It also flies in the face of the way African American men are often portrayed in health literature," said Derek Griffith, assistant professor in the U-M SPH and study author. "The men in our study are interested in being healthy, but they put their job and family responsibilities before their own health."

Julie Ober Allen and Katie Gunter of the U-M SPH are co-authors.

"Much focus is on the negative things that African American men don't do, but the reality is that many men are trying to engage in healthy activities but face significant social and economic challenges," Griffith said. "African American men in the study felt that they should spend their limited time outside of work with their spouses and children or involved in community activities and service—not attending to their individual health."

[Black men](#) typically suffer poorer health than other ethnic groups. Nearly 40 percent of black men over age 40 are obese, and they have higher rates of developing and dying from obesity-related conditions than white men or other groups of men, said Griffith. Additionally, black men die an average of seven years earlier than men of other races and ethnicities, and are more likely to suffer from undiagnosed chronic conditions.

Griffith's team conducted 14 focus groups with 105 urban, middle-aged African American men in the Midwest.

When researchers asked black men about physical activity, three major barriers were identified: time-consuming work, family and community commitments; prioritizing work and family responsibilities over exercise; little energy left for exercise after fulfilling social roles.

The findings highlight the need for physical activity interventions that consider how health and [physical activity](#) fit in the contexts of men's lives overall, Griffith said. The findings also suggest that understanding the unique social contexts of African American [men](#) could make health programs and providers more effective.

The paper appears online in the journal [Health Education and Behavior](#).

More information: rsw.sagepub.com/content/21/3/337.short

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