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The perception of physical activity and social support for physical activity among native Hawaiians 55 years and older

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Significance: Despite the known benefits of physical activity on healthy aging and longevity, sedentary living is a serious and pervasive health problem among older adults throughout the United States, including the Native Hawaiian older adult population in Hawaii. Previous research has identified social support as a major facilitator for participation in physical activity.

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to examine the perception of physical activity and social support for physical activity among Native Hawaiians 55 years of age and older.

Method: This qualitative, exploratory, ethnographic study utilized two focus groups each consisting of a purposive sample of 8 to 9 Native Hawaiian participants, ranging in age from 67 to 89 years, recruited from two separate rural Oahu, Hawaii communities. The study also included participant observation at two nutritional and recreational programs for native Hawaiians over the age of 60 in these communities.

Findings: Five domains emerged from the study data: culture, physical activity, social support, exercise, and purpose in life. Four major cultural themes emerged from these domains. 1) Participation in physical activity is necessary to maintain optimal health (*olapono*) and function. 2) Culturally sensitive social support is essential to encourage participation in physical activity. 3) An environment or “place” supportive of culturally congruent physical activity is necessary. 4) The main purpose for maintaining health through participation in physical activity is to perpetuate the Native Hawaiian culture by practicing and sharing Native Hawaiian cultural values and practices.

Biography

Verna Hanashiro completed her PhD in Nursing at the age of 69 years from the University of Hawaii at Manoa, Honolulu, Hawaii. She is presently an Instructor of Nursing at the School of Nursing and Dental Hygiene at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. She has more than 30 years experience in the Advanced Practice Registered Nurse role of a Gerontological Nurse Practitioner, and more than 20 years experience as a nursing educator in university and community college nursing programs. Her research focus is motivation for physical activity among the elderly, and she has published one article in a reputed journal.

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