

Exploring Barriers to Exercise in Low Socioeconomic Status (SES) Populations and Their Connection to Increasing Rates of Chronic Diseases and Obesity

Introduction

A well-established association exists between physical inactivity and the rising prevalence of obesity and chronic diseases. This study aims to investigate the impact of low socioeconomic status (defined as those with an annual income of less than \$20,000)⁽¹⁾ on human health, with a particular focus on identifying the barriers that prevent individuals in these populations from engaging in regular physical activity. The ultimate objective is to inform and guide community organizations in developing supportive environments that promote physical activity and address the underlying determinants of inactivity.

Conclusion

The association between lower socioeconomic status and increasing prevalence of chronic diseases and obesity is statistically significant. A primary barrier preventing individuals in this demographic from engaging in physical activity is a lack of motivation.

Methods

This cross-sectional study utilized a one-time survey administered to individuals aged 18 years and older with a body mass index (BMI) greater than 25. The survey was designed to assess the relationship between socioeconomic status (SES), health status, and physical activity levels, as well as to identify perceived barriers to engaging in regular exercise. A total of 116 participants were recruited, with 19 samples obtained from the Englewood Clinic and 97 from the Jackson Park Clinic. Statistical analyses were conducted to evaluate associations between (SES) and health outcomes. The study protocol was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Acknowledgement

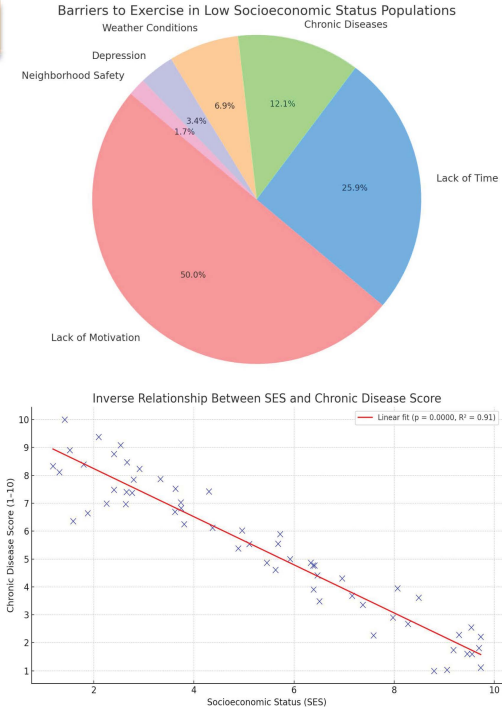
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Discussion

Our study reveals that simply building exercise facilities or reducing the cost of physical activity programs has limited impact on participation rates among low-SES groups. The primary barrier is lack of motivation, which we attribute to insufficient education about the role of physical activity in preventing diseases. The second leading barrier is lack of time, often due to longer working hours driven by financial necessity. Therefore, although economic support—such as access to better-paying jobs—is important, targeted educational initiatives are even more critical in fostering sustainable health behavior change within this population. Although, larger-sample studies are required to validate and strengthen these findings.

References

(1) US Census Bureau, 2025; income statistics for the year 2025



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