

Black leadership in girls' health: A peer-led physical activity program

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Culturally relevant approaches that address low physical activity rates among Black girls are increasing, yet opportunities to engage in physical activity remain minimal. Coupled with deficit approaches to school-based physical activity programming, positioning Black adolescent girls as physical activity leaders is missing from practice. BLinG-Health™ (Black Leadership in Girls' Health) aims to develop peer leaders to participate in and deliver group fitness sessions in after-school physical activity pilot program. A first to combine diffusions of innovations theory, racism as a root cause, and the sociological framework, this paper presents data on adolescent girls engaged in an 8-week pre-test-post-test quasi-experimental pilot study examining the impact of a peer-led, school-based physical activity intervention program targeting Black girls in high school on physical activity engagement, body composition, cardiovascular endurance, and muscular strength with a goal of sustainability as a permanent school program. Peer leaders led classmates in group fitness two to three days a week for eight weeks. Peer leaders and participants completed assessment rounds at baseline and week nine, including height and weight, to compute body mass index, waist circumference, hip circumference, hip-to-waist ratio, a 12-minute run/walk, and push-up test. Challenging deficit narratives on Black girls' physical activity engagement, participants consistently attended weekly group fitness sessions and improved cardiovascular and muscular fitness and health outcomes. Empowering Black adolescent girls/young women to lead group fitness sessions among peers may enhance physical activity engagement. Schools should consider culturally relevant programming to increase Black girls' opportunities to engage in physical activity.