

**Stony Brook University  
The Graduate School**

Doctoral Defense Announcement

**Abstract**

Correlates of Physical Activity in Pregnant Women

By

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Despite evidence establishing that prenatal physical activity is safe for most healthy pregnant women, the majority of pregnant women are sedentary. This study used well-validated instruments to examine correlates of physical activity and to test theoretically-based hypotheses about factors associated with prenatal physical activity in a diverse sample of 180 pregnant women. The results indicate that pregnant women engage in some forms of physical activity, but for the majority, not often enough to provide health benefits. Psychological resources and well-being were associated with greater likelihood of walking and moderate physical activity. Lack of time and energy were the most commonly-reported impediments to physical activity. Results also suggest that most pregnant women do not know that physical activity is safe and is associated with better birth outcomes. Younger, less educated, and multiparous women were least knowledgeable in this study.

Using a multidimensional conceptualization of physical activity, hypotheses based on several different theoretical perspectives were examined. Results are consistent with Social Cognitive theories which suggest that people who exercise believe that they have the ability and an incentive to do so. There was also support for the Health Belief Model which suggests that people who engage in health behaviors believe that the benefits of performing the behavior outweigh the costs of not performing the behavior. These findings indicate that psychological factors, particularly psychological resources, attitudes, and beliefs, are important correlates of physical activity in pregnant women. Researchers may learn more about what motivates and maintains physical activity in pregnant women and other populations by focusing on these factors as well as environmental variables and individual characteristics that also influence whether people exercise.

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