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A Longitudinal Assessment of Change in Blood Pressure Among Participants in the Heart Smarts Program

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Many low-income areas of the United States are considered food deserts because people living in those communities have limited access to fresh fruits and vegetables (FFV); lack of FFV is tied to numerous health issues, including cardiovascular disease and obesity. The Heart Smarts Program (HSP) provides increased access to FFV in food deserts, as well as providing participants with nutrition education courses and health screenings, including blood pressure. The purpose of this study is to examine HSP participants who have been with the program for differing lengths of time in order to determine if length of participation has an impact on magnitude of change in blood pressure. Participants are self-selected members of the community who frequent the corner stores in which the HSP operates and who have chosen to participate in health screenings. The blood pressure readings of participants who had two or more screenings with the HSP were analyzed to determine the longitudinal impact of participation in the HSP on change in blood pressure. Analysis of the average change in both systolic and diastolic blood pressures between four groups of participants who had taken part in the HSP for differing lengths of time showed no significant difference ($p=0.625$, $p=0.259$). This indicates that increased length of participation in the HSP is not associated with a larger drop in blood pressure when compared to those who have participated for a shorter time. However, this study does not examine changes in weight, eating habits, and level of nutrition education, and therefore it is unable to determine the longitudinal effects of the HSP as a whole.