

Summer 2017

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Recommended Citation

Ejikeme, Chinwe (2017) "Tailoring a Hybrid Program for Reducing Health and Education Disparities in Georgia Communities: Outcomes of Listening Sessions," *Journal of the Georgia Public Health Association*: Vol. 7 : No. 1 , Article 14.

DOI: 10.21633/jgpha.7.115

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/jgpha/vol7/iss1/14>

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Conference Abstract

Tailoring a hybrid program for reducing health and education disparities in Georgia communities: Outcomes of listening sessions

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Background: Minorities in Georgia experience increased rates of chronic disease and poor health and education outcomes. In the general population in 2013, about 35% of adolescents were either overweight or obese and approximately 13% of children 2-4 years old were obese, with minorities accounting for higher rates. In 2010, 23% of students from low-income families, comprising a higher proportion of minorities, scored at or above proficient level for reading at the end of third grade. Targeting children 0-5 years, Georgia Department of Public Health developed an integrated curriculum to train Early Childcare Educators (ECEs) to increase their knowledge and skills to model food, activity and language nutrition in their classrooms and to coach families. We conducted listening sessions to understand attitudes and knowledge around nutrition in 3 communities with significant racial and ethnic populations.

Methods: Listening sessions with ECEs and families were conducted separately in each community. Participants engaged in guided one-hour discussions around food, activity and language nutrition and completed a post-listening session survey to assess their nutrition practices with the children in their care or homes.

Results: 70 ECEs and families participated in the sessions and post session surveys. With an over 80% satisfaction rate with sessions, results showed that although baseline understanding of and challenges to modelling nutrition differed in different communities, many strategies used to support nutrition were common across communities. Participants also demonstrated a need for support in increasing access to resources to improve nutrition.

Conclusions: This study suggested that multiple issues hinder optimal engagement of children 0-5 years in improved nutrition. Addressing the factors specific to targeted communities is essential to reducing disparities. Thus, integrating these findings in the development of the curriculum and training strategy has the potential to produce more knowledgeable and skilled ECEs as coaches for improving nutrition.

Key words: food nutrition, physical activity, language nutrition, listening sessions, early childcare educators, formative evaluation, health disparities

<https://doi.org/10.21633/jgpha.7.115>

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