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Impact of a Preschool Obesity Prevention (I-POP) Program on Nutrition Knowledge Scores of Head Start Parents and Teachers

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Objectives: To determine the effectiveness of an evidence-based preschool obesity prevention intervention on rural, low-income parents' and Head Start teachers' nutrition knowledge relative to advice from experts, nutrient content of foods, and health benefits of foods.

Methods: Parent-child dyads were recruited from 9 randomized Head Start centers with 5 centers in the experimental group and 4 centers in the control. The intervention consisted of 8 weekly evidence-based nutrition education sessions for children delivered by the Head Start teachers; a teacher workshop on the use of Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) in the classroom; and 8 parent workshops using an evidence-based behavioral intervention, Parent Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT). The PBIS and PCIT reinforced nutrition education sessions by including instruction for positive meal-time behaviors. A repeated measures design consisted of data collected

at pre- (T1), post-intervention (T2), and a 6-month follow-up (T3). T1 and T2 results of a validated and reliable nutrition knowledge survey to address the sub-objective of the main study are reported here.

Results: 175 parents and 75 teachers participated in T1 data collection, of which 95 parents and 64 teachers completed T2. There were no significant differences in total scores within or between parent or teacher groups, scoring an average of 34% and 38% out of 100% for parents and teachers, respectively. However, there was a significant change in the knowledge of health benefits of foods survey section (31.6% to 39.5% correct) for parents in the experimental group from T1 to T2 ($P < .05$).

Conclusions: Overall, parents and teachers had poor knowledge of advice from experts, nutrient content of foods, and health benefits of foods at T1. Parents and teachers did have minimal, indirect nutrition education during PCIT and PBIS, which may have contributed to parents' increase in awareness of health benefits of food at T2. However, there may be a lack of knowledge of how to apply nutrition principles. Nutrition education and intervention should target parents and teachers of children with a specific aim in application of nutrition principals.

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