Comparative Evaluation of Interactive, Facilitated-discussion and Indirect Nutrition Education Methods for SNAP-Ed Clients

UT Extension

Executive Summary

Land Grant SNAP-Ed Office Research Grant Report 2009-2010

Project Investigators

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Project Timeline

April 2009 – August 2010

Overview

Research has identified interactive and facilitated discussion classes as two effective methods for delivery of nutrition education to SNAP-Ed adults. However, there is limited research that has compared the effectiveness of different types of delivery methods in order to determine the optimal teaching style for changing nutrition-related behaviors in adults. The purpose of this project was to compare the effects of different educational interventions on the nutrition-related behaviors of low-income adults. Three nutrition education methods were evaluated: experiential, hands-on, interactive classes; facilitated-discussion classes without the hands-on learning component; and indirect nutrition education methods such as displays, taste testing and flyers. Classes were presented to SNAP-Ed audiences throughout Tennessee, taught by Family and Consumer Sciences Extension County Agents and Program Assistants.

Research Questions

1. Are there differences in intermediate nutrition behavior based on type of teaching method (interactive, facilitated discussion, indirect education)?
2. Are there differences in intermediate nutrition-related behavior based on intensity of follow-up (monthly follow-up versus no monthly follow-up)?
3. How effective are indirect interventions in changing nutrition outcomes?

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Interventions

Three groups of adult SNAP-Ed participants were compared based on the type of nutrition intervention received:

- Interactive Lesson Group: a series of three interactive lessons with hands-on activities
- Facilitated Lesson Group: a series of three facilitated discussion classes
- Indirect Education Group: a single indirect education contact at a commodity food distribution site

Lesson content was from existing peer-reviewed nutrition education materials whenever possible. The Interactive and the Facilitated Groups' classes were adapted from the USDA *Loving Your Family Feeding Their Future* curriculum—a series of four lessons designed for low-income parents and caregivers of children. The Indirect Education Group received printed nutrition education materials that focused on increasing fruits and vegetables in the diet, using recipes for commodity foods and practicing food safety techniques such as cooking and storing foods at correct temperatures.

Research Design and Implementation

This quasi-experimental design project was conducted by Family & Consumer Sciences Extension Agents in twenty counties across Tennessee--eight counties taught interactive classes, six taught facilitated discussion classes, and six provided indirect education sites for data collection. These 20 counties were divided randomly into two groups: 10 counties where participants received monthly follow-up newsletters and 10 counties with no monthly follow-up newsletters. Newsletters reinforced nutrition messages and contained recipes and information about local county events related to wellness.

Measures

Participants in all three groups were surveyed at three time points: baseline, 3 month follow-up and 6 month follow-up using the *Food Stamp Program Food Behavior Checklist* developed by Sylva and colleagues (2006), a validated measure of nutrition behaviors. Additional questions selected from *Notebook of Short Questions Recommended for Evaluation Nutrition Education Programs* (An, Hersey, & Richa, 2003) captured behaviors related to resource management, physical activity, and attitudes about healthy eating.

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Participants

Baseline data was collected from 352 participants: 122 interactive, 57 facilitated, and 173 indirect. The majority were women (73%). Participants ranged in age from 18 to over 60 years (median age 40 to 49 years). The sample was diverse (25% African Americans; 70% white; 3% Hispanic/Latino; 2% other racial groups). Education levels were low (37% did not graduate from high school; 40% had a high school diploma or GED) and few participants were working (11% full-time; 7% part-time). Over half of participants reported receiving SNAP benefits (61%).

Findings

From data analysis, being in the Interactive Lesson Group was related to the following improved nutritional behaviors at 3 months: increased servings of fruit and vegetables eaten daily; increased variety of vegetables eaten daily. Being in the Facilitated Lesson Group was related to the following improved nutritional behavior at 3 months: increased servings of fruit eaten daily. Indirect education methods did not produce intermediate length nutrition-related behavior change. For all groups, participants who received follow-up newsletters had the following improved nutritional behavior at 6 months: increased servings of fruit eaten daily.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study provides preliminary results of the benefits of interactive nutrition education interventions for low-income adults. It is likely that more intensive interventions would produce stronger results for longer periods of time. It is encouraging to see evidence that the direct education provided through SNAP-Ed can result in intermediate behavior change, especially when compared with indirect education methods.

The investigators feel that there are many opportunities to demonstrate effectiveness of nutrition education with SNAP-Ed clients. Grants such as this one will inspire others to participate in the evaluation process. They would encourage the Land Grant SNAP-Ed Universities Program to continue such grant support and to promote an ongoing dialog among nutrition educators regarding evaluation of programs presented to SNAP-Ed clients.

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