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Learner Centered Health Messages: A Strategy to Improve the Health and Well-Being of Rural, Low-income Families

Background

Rural, low-income families face greater challenges to physical, mental, and dental health compared to their counterparts living in non-rural areas (NCHA, 2001). Latinos face even greater challenges to access to health care information that is crucial for preventing disease and promoting health (Fox and Jones, 2009). Studies reveal rural families with low health literacy experience greater health disparities (Kutner et al., 2006). To help alleviate these health disparities, it is necessary to promote and disseminate health information that is timely, culturally relevant, and based on principles of health literacy (Clayman M et al. 2010).

Purpose

To gather input from rural Latina mothers who have young children and low incomes to develop effective learner-driven core health messages related to food security, dental health, and physical activity. This study is part of the USDA-NIFA funded project, *Core Health Messages: A Strategy to Improve the Health and Well-Being of Rural Families with Low Incomes*.

Research Questions

1. What content and framing in health messages targeted to rural Latina mothers who have low incomes and young children will motivate them to action?
2. How do rural Latina mothers who have low incomes and young children prefer to receive health messages?

Participants

Data were gathered from 5 Spanish speaking Latina mothers who have household incomes \leq 185% poverty and children \leq 12 years of age and who participated in the Rural Families Speak about Health study (see <http://www.ruralfamiliespeak.org>).

Nationality	Age	Education	Number of children	Number of years in the U.S.
Guatemala	28	Some high school	2	3
Mexico	34	High school	4	8
Mexico	25	8 th grade or less	3	9
Mexico	25	8 th grade or less	1	13
Mexico	32	Some high school	5	3

Methods

A focus group was conducted by 2 native Spanish speaking graduate students. The interview was audio-taped, transcribed verbatim in Spanish and translated into English. Thematic analysis was used to identify themes emerging from the data. An audience response system (i.e., "clickers") was used to gather data pertaining to the desired "voice" of a message.

Impersonal Voice

Making a grocery list may help you save money. Without a list, you may buy food you don't really need and spend more money. Keep a grocery list throughout the week or month to help you remember what items to purchase when you're at the store.

Personal Voice

Hi, I'm Maria a busy mom of three and I am always pinched for money. In order to stretch our food dollars, I make a grocery list throughout the week leading to a trip to the grocery store.

Authority Voice

As a health educator, I've talked to many busy mothers who struggle to feed their family healthy food. Their money, food stamps or WIC vouchers just don't go far enough to get through the end of the month. I recommend keeping a grocery list throughout the week or month leading to a trip to the store to save time and so they don't buy what they don't need.

Findings

Research Question 1

Theme: Mothers want messages to include examples they can relate to and that express empathy towards the difficulties they encounter.

Theme: Mothers favor an emotional connection to the speaker:

"Because they (messages) have to give importance to yourself and your health. Equal importance to our children and ourselves."

"It also serves as an example because if children see how one takes care of one's health, they (children) will take care of their health as well."

"Well, she is someone like us. One is always going to say 'I have little money, I need to save money.' This is almost true for all of us here."

Theme: Mothers appreciate information including positive consequences of action (e.g., "making a list will save you money and time") and consequences of inaction (e.g., if you don't have a list, you will spend more money than necessary).

"It's good to know what can happen as well, but if you only see the negative (part) you do not know about the good things, it is better to have both."

"Because one listens two opinions, the good and the bad."

Findings

Research Question 2

Theme: Mothers prefer health messages from an expert, an "authority voice" such as a health professional:

"I because is a person who know....because is the person that would know better about health"

"Because if is a doctor, they know the causes of diseases, they treat many cases of diabetes and high blood pressure and heart. They know the causes of all problems and they have the authority to give advice to people."

Theme: Mothers want to receive messages via the Internet (e.g., text messages, social media) and TV including programs in Spanish. For printed materials mothers preferred messages with pictures or photos to better understand the content:

"Because one imagines it (message) better with photos or videos that go with the message."

"If you don't understand the written message, with videos or photos you are able to understand it."

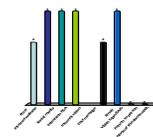
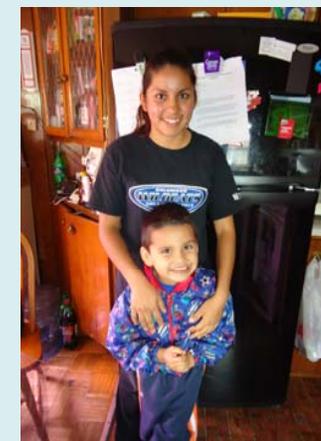


Figure 1: Significant participants preferences for health information sources



Implications for Creating Messages

Messages should...

- be tailored to perceive a personal connection with the speaker.
- have an "authority voice" e.g., health worker.
- convey empathy towards mothers' situations.
- discuss the consequences of specific healthy and unhealthy behaviors.
- be disseminated via mainstream TV (especially programs in Spanish) and the Internet.

References

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