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Title: Family-based pediatric health education for refugees
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Background: Refugees are at risk for low health literacy and higher illness rates compared to the general population. Refugees resettled by Integrated Refugee and Immigrant Services (IRIS) in Connecticut identified four pediatric health topics, nutrition, safety, oral health, and parenting, as areas of particular interest for further education. We developed a family-based, interactive pediatric health education curriculum based on these topics for local refugees.

Methodology: We created four hour-long interactive classes based on literature review and expert input. Each class incorporated play-based activities for toddlers. Activities were integrated into discussion with parents using visual aids. In person interpreters in Pashto, Dari, Arabic, Swahili, and Kinyarwanda provided real-time translation. We assessed knowledge acquisition using pre- and post-class tests.

Results: Each class was attended by 9-12 adults (56-67% female, ages 19-57) and 3-5 toddlers. Educational background among adult attendees ranged from no school to community college after resettlement. Teachers reported that children were engaged during the activities, which fueled discussion among adult participants. Class assessment demonstrated a significantly increase in scores for the safety class (88% to 97%, paired t-test p-value=0.04), a trend toward increased scores for the nutrition class (83% to 90%, paired t-test p-value=0.07), and no increase for the parenting and oral health classes. Participants indicated that they learned from the classes and would recommend them to others.

Discussion: This series of classes demonstrated that using family-based activities and discussion is an accepted and effective means to convey child health information to refugees in a culturally-inclusive manner. This class setting facilitated delving into content that refugee parents desired deeper understanding of but are typically only briefly covered in well-child visits. While average test scores improved after two of the classes, variation in the degree of change in test scores is likely attributable to small sample size and varied baseline educational levels of the participants. Based on these results, we plan to expand the availability of these classes, develop similarly formatted curricula on additional topics of interest, and explore more robust means of evaluating knowledge acquisition.

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