

Perspectives on Healthy Foods and Activity in the Y-K Delta

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Got Neqqpiaq?

Background

- ➔ Obesity in early childhood a strong predictor of adult obesity
- ➔ Prevention efforts in Indigenous communities most effective when aligned with local perceptions and understandings
- ➔ Alaska Native communities respect for Elders as wisdom bearers
- ➔ Elders play a major role in maximizing intervention efforts

Purpose

We sought the wisdom of local Yup'ik and Cup'ik Elders and sought knowledge and experiences of storekeepers in the Yukon-Kuskokwim (Y-K) Alaska region to gain perspectives on local diet and lifestyle



Focus Group Discussions (FGD)

- Semi-structured, in-person focus groups
- 25 focus groups conducted with family advocates (6), parents (84), and Elders (66) - May 2018 and December 2018
- Questions connected to Yupik and Cupik ways of knowing, traditional foods, physical activity, family mealtime, and the upcoming intervention
- No identifying information gathered from participants
- Focus groups were recorded, transcribed, translated, and analyzed by two researchers
- Major themes were allowed to emerge

Focus Group Discussions - Major Themes

- The benefits of traditional foods & how they are harvested, prepared, and stored
- The importance of family mealtimes
- The ways in which physical activity has changed
- Emerging concerns - around sugar-sweetened beverages, screen time, the presence of junk foods, availability of traditional foods, changing notions of parenting



FGD Quotes

“Eat your Yup’ik food, don’t lose it”

“If you don’t teach them how to catch their food, they won’t know it.”

“Our ancestors used to say that our native foods are really good to eat. They are the healthful foods. And also the berries. And also the plants that grow around this land. They’re really good. And some are medicines, like the plants. And then as I was growing up I came upon two people who became sick and they said that they blamed the preservatives that are in canned food.”

“I think it’s very important that you teach the young people our traditional way of life. That way, they will use it when they get older and pass it onto their children. My father passed on his tradition to me and I’m slowly passing that tradition onto my children. It’s very important.”

“Drinking that soda does not have a good end.”

Key Informant Interviews (KII)

- In-person key informant interviews
- 20 community storeowners/managers in person or over the phone
- Questions explored access to and availability of:
 - Fresh, frozen, & canned fruits/vegetables
 - Bottled water & healthy beverages
 - Ways to help parents of young children make healthy food choices for their families
- Interviews were taped (with permission), transcribed, and analyzed for recurring themes



Key Informant Interviews - Findings

- At least one store in every community carries fresh produce
 - More variety and better quality in the summer
- Spoilage (due to transport delays) is major problem with fresh & frozen fruits/vegetables
 - Waste drives customer costs up
- Bottled water available in most stores
 - Near same price as pop
- Store owners would like to sell more fresh/frozen fruits/veggies
 - Have to carry what customers want
 - Lots of ideas on how to get parents to buy healthier foods for their families

KII Quotes

“...everybody is going to buy, drink, and eat sugary fatty foods because it’s cheap. And I don’t see an end to it because the prices are not going to go down.”

“Sales won't let me stop ordering soda. It’s money. So I’ve got to go by what they say.”

“...our elders are passing quickly so I think it’s that knowledge ...[we] should be trying to learn to hand down to our kids. Because there’s way more natural healthier stuff here for free than trying to buy it ... to eat.”

Conclusions

- ➔ Yup'ik and Cup'ik Elders improve understanding of local views on traditional diet and physical activities support and interventions incorporating local traditional views and values
- ➔ Storekeepers in the communities may play a role in improving nutrition intake with programmatic or community policies in place



Thank You!



Questions?

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