HEALTH LITERACY AS A DETERMINANT OF HEALTHY EATING AND ACTIVE LIVING IN CANADIAN IMMIGRANT YOUTH

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The purpose of this study was to identify the specific health literacy needs of immigrant and refugee youth and their families related to healthy eating and active living activities.
Focus of presentation

■ I will focus on the data collected on the immigrant/refugee children.
Methodology

- **Design**: We employed a mixed methodological approach using a case study design.
- **Setting**: One of the larger cities in the province of Alberta.
- **Recruitment**: Youth who attended both school driven and community based leadership and healthy living programs.
Data collection

- A Collage activity
- Photo voice
- Focus group interviews
Findings

“Health literacy implies the achievement of a level of knowledge, personal skills and confidence to take action to improve personal and community health by changing lifestyle and living conditions. Thus health literacy means more than being able to read pamphlets and make appointment. By improving peoples access to health information, and their capacity to use it effectively, health literacy is critical to empowerment” (Nutbeam, 2008, pp. 2074 – 5).
- Functional Literacy - *having the reading and writing skills necessary to function in everyday life. Also include science literacy, media literacy, computer literacy.*

- Lack of linguistic understanding contribute to social isolation.
- Lack of ability to understand food labels contributed to challenges finding food that is cultural acceptable to consume.
- Communicative/interactive literacy - one’s capacity to function in a social context.
  
  - Youth relied on friends to support them to access different activities.
  - Being in contact with immigrants from their country of origin was helpful.
  - Youth identified the active living school based projects as very helpful to access various activities.
- **Critical literacy** - advanced cognitive skills which together with social skills, can be applied to critically analyzed information and to use this information to exert greater control over one’s live (Nutbeam, 2000, pp. 264).

  - Youth critically reflected on aspects that were different and which effected their eating habits and activating living
    - Lack of having transport; a car was representative of an easier life.
    - Cold weather a barrier to outdoor sports.
    - Connecting over crowding, overpopulation and pollution with ill health.
    - Importance of hygiene and previous lack thereof in refugee camps.
Critical literacy continue:

- Family both a source of health information and target for sharing of new health information acquired at school.
- Supporting a child’s various sport activities is not always an immediate attribute that apparent has; need to be co-developed with children.
- Civic literacy - “ability that enables citizens to become aware of public issues and become involved in the decisions-making process (Zarcadoolas, 2005, p. 196).

- Youth identified the school, media, friends and social services and public sources of information on healthy living and eating practices
- Peer influences were identified as both negative and positive.
- Social support networks were important in disseminating information to facilitate active living.
■ Cultural literacy- ability to recognize and use collective beliefs, customs, world views and social identity in order to interpret and act on health information” (Zarcadoolas, 2005, p. 196).

- Isolation from their particular religious groups made specific religious practices challenging.
- Youth identifies engagement in community activities and festivals as healthy ways of living and connecting with the broader community.
Recommendations

- Efforts to reduce language and cultural barriers are essential to improve health literacy.
- Providing professional translation in school environment important – especially when parent participate in activities.
- Teacher involvement especially gym teachers, are important in fostering inclusive active living environments.
- Increase points of access to recreational facilities, sport organizations and PHC services in immigrant settlement and support agencies.
- Services – youth-focused and youth/family centered.
- Encourage schools to offer alternative recreational activities that align with the capabilities and interest of newcomer populations.
- Expand programs – school based programming provide a safe and secure environment for newcomer youth, to explore critical issues related to health literacy and active living.
Team members

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Questions

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