Quality of Life Considerations for Nutrition Education Interventions Targeting Parents of Elementary School-Age Children

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Abstract

Objectives
The PRECEDE-PROCEDE model posits that health promotion interventions firmly predicated on factors defining the target audience’s quality of life (QOL) are critical to success. Thus, this study aimed to describe how parents of elementary school-age children defined quality of life with the goal of informing the tone and thrust of childhood obesity prevention intervention materials.

Methods
Focus groups were conducted by trained moderators with English- and Spanish-speaking parents of 6- to 11-year-olds (n=185) in 3 states (FL, NJ, WV).

Results
Critical factors affecting parents’ QOL and life satisfaction were the happiness of family members, family cohesion, family health, having enough time to spend with their families, financial stability, and for some, spirituality. English-speaking parents also included having time for themselves to do activities that they enjoy, limiting stress, and setting goals. Key factors diminishing parents’ QOL were time scarcity and work-life balance. To improve their QOL and satisfaction with life, Spanish-speaking parents wanted more time to spend with kids and English-speaking parents felt a need to better balance time stresses from kids’ extracurricular activities. Having more supportive relationships, better health, and financial stability were other factors parents’ felt would improve their overall QOL. Spanish-speaking parents also felt that having a greater sense of community (e.g., knowing neighbors) would improve their QOL. Parents were aware that their lifestyles and behaviors that they model to children (e.g., physical activity, eating, screen time) affect their families’ QOL now and in the future, so they actively encouraged their families to engage in healthier behaviors. Parents also recognized that a positive home environment (one that limits stress, promotes family cohesion, supports healthy behaviors) could help them improve their QOL.

Conclusions
Key factors affecting parents’ QOL focus on family happiness, cohesion, family health, time sufficiency, financial stability, and for some, spirituality. Health promotion and nutrition education interventions responsive to factors defining parents’ QOL and desired improvements identified in this study remain rare, yet have the potential to increase intervention recruitment, retention, and effectiveness.

Methods
Sample
- Parents of children ages 6-11 years
- English and Spanish speaking
- From 3 states (FL, NJ, WV)

Data Collection
- 64 Focus Groups (n=185)
- Data analysis
- Constant comparison to identify point of data saturation
- Coding to identify themes and trends in the data

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Strengths & Limitations
Strengths
- Focus groups in both English and Spanish
- Focus groups led by trained moderators using guide to ensure uniformity and completeness
- Geographic diversity (NJ, FL, WV)

Limitations
- Low representation of fathers
- Data were self-report

Results

Perceived Effects of Lifestyle on Health
English-speaking Parents:
- Importance of modeling healthy behaviors (healthy eating, physical activity, dental care)

Spanish-speaking Parents:
- Work schedule leads to unhealthy lifestyle (increased consumption of convenience foods)
- Lack of child supervision leads to increased screen time and decreased physical activity

What Determines Personal Happiness
- Health of family
- Happiness of family
- Financial stability
- Personal time (English-speaking parents)

Major Factors Affecting Parents’ Life Satisfaction
- Financial stability
- Time management
- Work-life balance
- Spanish-speaking Parents: lack of time to spend with kids due to work
- English-speaking Parents: children’s activity schedule

Changes that would Improve Parents’ Life Satisfaction
- More time with kids
- Improved finances
- More supportive relationships (community, family, spouse)

Perceived Effects of Home Environment on Health
- Positive home environment leads to good mental and physical health
- Positive physical activity environment leads to outdoor play
- Food environment (restricting unhealthy foods available) leads to healthier food choices
- Spanish-speaking parents: home environment leads to stronger family bonds

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Conclusions
- Parents of elementary-school children agreed that factors affecting their quality of life have a direct impact on their families’ health.
- Family members’ health, financial stability, and time management were major factors affecting QOL for both English and Spanish-speaking parents.
- Both English and Spanish-speaking parents felt modeling healthy behaviors was important but felt lack of time available to spend with their children inhibited their ability to promote healthy behaviors.
- Parents recognized the effect the environment (home, physical activity and food) has on their family.