

APHA 2009 Abstract

204924 Responding to a community request: Gender exclusive swims in a Somali immigrant community
November 8, 2009

As part of *Caucus on Refugee and Immigrant Health*

Session 2054.0: Climate changes, migration and its impact on health
scheduled for Sunday, November 8, 2009: 4:30 PM-5:30 PM in Hall A/B

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OBJECTIVE: We examined the feasibility and acceptability of a swim program that targeted the Somali Muslim immigrant community.

METHODS: Gender exclusive swims were planned with the collaboration of a diverse partnership. The community partnership included Somali leaders, community agencies, health care providers, public health, and municipal departments. Public pools were rented with support from a governmental grant and female and male swims were held at separate times. Gender exclusive staff were hired and privacy from onlookers was established. Volunteers advertised and ran the program. Swim lessons, water safety and aerobics were held for adults and children. At six events, a short pen and paper survey was completed with adult participants.

RESULTS: Twenty-six swim events were held over twenty-two months with a total participation of 897 persons. Childcare, overcrowding, advertising, transportation, funding, and sustainability were issues overcome by the diverse partnership network. 80 participants completed a survey. 99% reported they would return to a similar event. 88% of swimmers reported that they would not attend if the opposite gender were in the pool. 39% of women reported they did nothing else for exercise.

CONCLUSIONS: We found that there is a demand for culturally sensitive exercise and an interest in water activities in both males and females of the Somali community. The pool environment was well accepted when transformed for privacy. Logistical barriers were overcome with a diverse partnership. Further gender exclusive fitness options are required to meet the health needs of this population.

Learning Objectives:

Explain how community partnerships were used to address an immigrant health issue

Keywords: Immigrants, Community-Based Health Promotion

Presenting author's disclosure statement:

Qualified on the content I am responsible for because: I am a pediatrician and received my medical degree at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine in 2004. I completed a residency in Pediatrics in 2007 and am currently a fellow in Adolescent Medicine at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine. The research I am submitting on behalf of the authors is from our work where addressing the lack of physical fitness, social activities and water safety in a prominent immigrant population in Seattle, Washington. My familiarity with the Somali populations stemmed from my weekly resident continuity clinic with at a Medical Center that served this community. I was the coordinator of the research and intervention that I am submitting. I have presented similar information to local groups in Seattle and at my current program in Baltimore, MD over the last several years. I have an ongoing commitment to addressing health disparities in my clinical and research work.

Any relevant financial relationships? No