



Evaluation of the “healthy lifestyles” intervention program implemented in child-care centers in the Haifa municipality

Executive Summary

Background: The importance of promoting an active lifestyle and healthy nutrition among educational institutions is well documented in a number of studies. Educational staff in daycares and schools have a significant influence on establishing healthy habits among babies and children, as well as their parents. In order for education professionals to serve as a reliable resource for health information they must themselves have access to appropriate knowledge and tools. Teachers' nutritional knowledge influences their ability and confidence to teach about healthy diets, which in turn affects the schools' ability to create a healthy nutrition education program. Therefore, investing resources in raising staff awareness of nutrition and physical activity among children is crucial to minimize unhealthy lifestyle habits and to encourage positive habits from a young age.

Research Purposes: To evaluate the effects of an intervention program designed to encourage a healthy lifestyle among daycare children aged 0-3 and their parents, in Haifa, by targeting the knowledge, attitudes, perceived behavioral control and behavioral patterns of daycare staff.

Specific Purposes: To examine whether participation in the intervention program led to the following changes: an increase in knowledge among the daycare staff; the creation of positive attitudes towards lifestyle; perceived behavioral control within daily daycare activities; behavioral patterns (lifestyle) among the daycare staff.

Study Type: The current study is an evaluation of an intervention program for a healthy and active lifestyle that was carried out among the staff of daycares operated by a variety of organizations (WIZO, Na'amat, Amuna, and the Municipality) in Haifa during the months of March-July 2013. Within the framework of the study, questionnaires were distributed before and after the intervention. In addition, interview were conducted with the individuals participating in the program both during the program, and after it completion.

Study Population: The present study included daycare staff: managers, caretakers, and cooks who work in daycares operated by WIZO, Na'amat, Amuna, and the municipality in Haifa, and the daycare supervisor from each organization.

Research Process:

The current study includes two sub-studies:

1. **Quantitative Study:** within the framework of the quantitative portion of the study, 98 questionnaires were distributed to nine cooks, 64 caretakers, and 25 managers in the different daycares.
2. **Qualitative study:** Semi-structured interviews were carried out among daycare staff in order to learn the staffs' opinions regarding the contribution of the program on both personal and professional fronts. After the conclusions of the program, four supervisors from the different organizations who took part of the program were interviewed, in order to understand the contribution of taking part of continuing education courses for daycare staff, on changes in attitudes of the participants, and to what degree they feel the program contributed to them on personal and professional fronts.

Research Tools:

- 1) An anonymous questionnaire for self-reporting, which included:
 - a) questions about attitudes, subjective norms, and behaviors relating to: smoking, physical activity, nutrition and sun protection;
 - b) questions relating to the perceived importance of nutrition in the daycare framework
 - c) questions relating to the perceived ability of the workers to affect the nutrition and feeding habits in the daycare framework.
- 2) A semi-structured interview protocol used to conduct in-depth interviews with daycare staff, which included five main parts:
 - a) knowledge and attitudes relating to nutrition and physical activity;
 - b) attitudes relating to the intervention program;
 - c) implementation of the program in the daycare framework;
 - d) perceptions and attitudes relating to cooperation of the parents;
 - e) perceptions of the protocols relating to nutritional and physical activity in the daycare.

The protocol for the daycare center supervisors included questions relating to the attitudes and perceptions of the supervisors in terms of the contribution of the program to the daycare staffs; their perceptions and stances relating to their participation in the daycare committees; and the contribution of the continuing education for the supervisors.

Research Variables

Independent variables: socio-demographic variables (age, country of birth, religion, children, education, type of organization / nonprofit); position at the day care (manager, daycare counselor, cook); participation in the intervention program.

Dependent variables: behavioral patterns (nutrition habits, smoking, physical activity, sun protection) on both personal and daycare levels; attitudes and stances relating to living a healthy lifestyle on both personal and professional fronts; perceived behavioral control regarding maintaining a healthy lifestyle in the daycare; implementation of daycare policies in terms of maintaining a healthy lifestyle; involvement of the parents in promoting the health of the children at the daycare.

Results

Findings of the quantitative study: From reports of the various participants we found that policies at the daycares generally supported a healthy lifestyle (especially in the fields of nutrition and physical activity), even before the intervention was carried out. Naturally, a meaningful change was therefore not seen in participants reports in terms of daycare policy following the intervention. We can conclude from the results of the quantitative study that the intervention did not have a significant effect on the personal behaviors of the participants in terms of maintaining a healthy lifestyle. At the same time, after the intervention many of the participants reported a significant change for the better in their perceived behavioral control in the field of maintaining a lifestyle for the children. This influence is seen in the groups of the daycare counselors and the managers, who reported significant statistical changes in their knowledge levels and tools for maintaining a healthy lifestyle for the children in the daycare in the fields of nutrition and physical activity.

Findings from the qualitative study: From the interviews it was found that the continuing education contributed to an increase in knowledge and awareness of nutrition and physical activity among the daycare staff and supervisors. Implementation of the content was seen in the daycares themselves and in work with the children in terms of the types of food served, feeding methods, and general approach towards food. In addition, the comptrollers reported a slight change in daycare policy in terms of including physical activity in the daily schedule, although they report that this area could still use improvement. From the interview it was reported that changes were also seen among the staff themselves personally, and daycare counselors began walking to work and reported a greater awareness of food and eating.

Conclusions: Rules relating to promoting a healthy lifestyle in the framework of the daycares were in place before initiation of the intervention program following directives from the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Labor on the subject. In addition, most of the intervention participants reported a very high level of satisfaction with the content of the intervention program and its implementation. Following implementation of the intervention program in the daycares, participants reported a rise in their awareness of the role the daycare plays when it comes to influencing and

maintaining a healthy lifestyle among the children in general, and an increase in awareness to health in the daycare and their behaviors in this field in particular. Similarly, participants reported that the program provided them with knowledge and tools which allowed implementation of policies which promote a healthy lifestyle in terms of nutrition and physical activity for the children in the daycare/ This increase in knowledge and existence of tools among the participants was seen in the quantitative study as well, especially in the group of daycare counselors.

Recommendations: In line with topics that the intervention participants raise, we recommend to implement a continuation to the intervention program that was carried, in whose framework an emphasis will be placed on providing knowledge and tools to the daycare staff in the field of physical activity for children, as well as health and illness in childhood. Additionally it is recommended to separate the intervention program into separate programs for different groups of workers. It is recommended to integrate a variety of activities in the intervention, that is, more than simply the education strategy which was over-used in this case. Possible strategies for future implementation include targeting policy, the environment, and more.

In addition, it is possible in future programs to add an initial survey of needs of the staff that focuses on a healthy lifestyle in their personal lives, as they define it. This to enable influence on the personal behavior of the staff in their day to day as well, not just in the framework of their employment at the daycare.