

Shapedown Project: A Bilingual Approach for the Hispanic Community

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ABSTRACT

Obesity is a public health concern in the United States. Minority children, especially Mexican American boys and African American girls, are more likely than non-Hispanic White children to be obese. Obese children are at higher risk for chronic health conditions such as heart disease and Type II Diabetes and are at a greater risk for social and psychological problems. The objective of this study was to evaluate a Spanish version of the Shapedown program and assess its effectiveness in helping Latino families in Pontiac, Michigan learn to make healthy lifestyle choices regarding nutrition and exercise as they build effective family support relationships. The results show no significant differences in children's eating habits and importance of eating healthy foods between the Shapedown and control groups. However, we found a significant change in that scale over time. We did not expect, given a short period of time, to find a significant difference in children's BMI between the Shapedown and control groups or over time. Qualitative results showed valuable lessons learned from the Shapedown program, including learning how to eat healthy foods, how to exercise together as a family, and the importance of the family unit as key for long-term sustainability of adopting healthy lifestyles. Overall, the project was a positive experience for both participants and university researchers in terms of collaborative efforts, lessons learned, and barriers in conducting evaluation and collaborative research between university and community organizations.