

The Health Belief Model in Action: A Healthy Lifestyles Program for Female Residents of the Alachua County Work Release Program

Abstract

Background: Incarcerated women are at greater risk for developing chronic illnesses related to unhealthy lifestyle choices. The criminal justice system, therefore, has the potential to play a role in disseminating public health interventions for an at-risk population.

Objectives: The current study assessed the feasibility and acceptability of a six-week “healthy lifestyles” educational program provided to female residents of the Alachua County Work Release Program.

Methods: Female residents of the Alachua County Work Release Program were offered a “healthy lifestyles” educational program from February – March 2018. In addition to providing information about lifestyle habits to reduce risk for chronic diseases and practicing related skills (e.g., reading nutrition labels, understanding MyPlate guidelines, identifying exercise intensity, using the Stoplight dietary guidelines), sessions incorporated evidence-based behavior-change strategies derived from Social Learning Theory (e.g., stimulus control, self-monitoring, setting SMART goals, problem solving). An eight-question survey (scores ranging from 1 – 6 on a Likert scale) was administered to assess whether the educational program resulted in meaningful increases in knowledge of and self-efficacy for engaging in evidence-based recommendations for dietary intake and physical activity.

Results: A total of six female Alachua County Work Release residents (ages ≥ 18) in Gainesville, Florida, participated in the program. Attendance at intervention sessions was variable and depended upon the number of female residents at the facility each week. Given that only one participant attended all six sessions, the pre- and post-intervention surveys did not provide useful quantitative information about changes in knowledge and self-efficacy. However, informal feedback about the program’s impact was overwhelmingly positive.

Conclusions: The development, implementation, and evaluation of the current special project provide a framework for future iterations of health education programs in underserved populations. Although attendance was a significant challenge, this study provides a model of translating and disseminating evidence-based interventions for priority populations negatively affected by social determinants of health. The results of this pilot initiative will be utilized to apply for state and federal grant funding for future health promotion programs for Alachua County Work Release residents.

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