

Local Perceptions of Barriers to Optimal Health in South Texas Colonias

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BACKGROUND

- Colonias are impoverished, unincorporated Latino communities found in border counties of Texas and other border states.
- These communities are medically underserved and have high rates of obesity and diabetes.
- ARISE is a non-profit, non-partisan women's empowerment organization that serves families living in colonias in Hidalgo County, Texas.
- Since women play a key role in the dissemination of health information to children, ARISE offers health education groups to enable women to help prevent diabetes and obesity in their children
- This aims of this study were to:
 - Assess the knowledge of diabetes and obesity.
 - Identify the health needs of families in the colonias.
 - Disseminate these findings to ARISE and other community groups so that future interventions may be designed to target these issues.

METHODS

Study design:

- 24 Spanish-speaking women were interviewed in Spanish by 2 researchers (Drs. Dave and Losada).
- Potential interviewees were identified by ARISE staff as:
 - Mothers or grandmothers with children in their households
 - Residence in a colonia served by ARISE
 - Utilizing services provided by ARISE for themselves and/or their children.
 - Available during business hours for interviews
- Interviews used a standard script with open-ended questions regarding obesity, diabetes and community health.
- General responses were collected and compiled into groups based on problem type.
- Once dangerous dogs were identified as a major community problem, local hospitals were contacted to obtain data on incidence of visits for dog bites.
- Data were obtained from hospital administrators in the Rio Grande Valley.
- Approval from the UTHSCSA Institutional Review Board was obtained.

RESULTS

- Several themes regarding the health of the women and children in the colonias emerged from the interviews:
 - The presence of dangerous dogs in the streets of the colonias prevents children and families from exercising outside.
 - Mothers and grandmothers are unclear about how active their children are while at school.
 - Residents of colonias lack access to fresh produce and other healthy choices and generally consume a culturally specific high-fat, high-carbohydrate diet.
 - Many impoverished residents of the colonias have no access to medical care and lack health insurance due to immigration status.
- The increase in violence along the U.S.-Mexican border has added additional barriers to health access for colonias residents by preventing travel across the border to obtain low-cost healthcare in Mexico.
- Women who attended "grupos de salud" at ARISE obtained education about healthy lifestyles that they felt they could implement for their families.
- The interviewees felt that lack of education about diet and lack of access to exercise contributed to childhood obesity in their community.



Photo: A roaming pack of dogs³

Table 1: Number of Dog Bites Each Month Seen in 3 ERs of the South Texas Health System⁸

| Month | Year | #Bites |
|-------|------|--------|
| Nov | 2011 | 20 |
| Dec | 2011 | 32 |
| Jan | 2012 | 31 |
| Feb | 2012 | 17 |
| Mar | 2012 | 28 |
| Apr | 2012 | 24 |
| May | 2012 | 27 |
| Jun | 2012 | 31 |
| Jul | 2012 | 26 |
| Aug | 2012 | 36 |
| Sep | 2012 | 28 |
| Oct | 2012 | 21 |

Table 2: Number of Dog Bites per month in 2012 seen in ED by age at Rio Grande Regional Hospital⁵

| Month | # Dog Bites by Age | | |
|-------|--------------------|----------|--------|
| | <11yrs | 11-17yrs | >17yrs |
| Jan | 3 | 2 | 9 |
| Feb | 2 | 2 | 6 |
| Mar | 2 | 1 | 4 |
| Apr | 5 | 0 | 2 |
| May | 3 | 3 | 6 |
| Jun | 4 | 1 | 3 |
| Jul | 5 | 1 | 2 |
| Aug | 3 | 2 | 2 |
| Sep | 4 | 1 | 2 |
| Oct | 4 | 2 | 3 |

CONCLUSIONS

- Our study indicates that women in colonias desire better access to healthcare and education about healthy lifestyles for their families.
- This population faces difficulty in accessing healthy foods, safe places for exercise, and basic medical care for their children.
- A high-fat, high-carbohydrate diet, lack of knowledge about how active children are at school, and the presence of dangerous dogs in the streets are culturally specific challenges for this community.
- Interventions that could be beneficial in reducing obesity in this community include: offering nutrition classes and structured exercise programs for children, reducing dangerous dogs in the streets, and expanding access to care at local clinics.

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