

“Speak to Me, Not My Mom”

Self-Reported Health Concerns of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities

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Objectives

- Understand self-perceptions about health of Special Olympics athletes.
- Measure immediate increases in knowledge after attending a Special Olympics Healthy Athletes® event.
- Test the effectiveness of utilizing Special Olympics athletes as interviewers.



Introduction

Special Olympics, an international nonprofit organization providing sports training and competition opportunities for persons with intellectual disabilities, offers health screenings and services for its athletes at sports events.

In 2006, Special Olympics conducted a pilot survey of athletes receiving screenings at the Healthy Athletes venue at its USA National Games in Ames, Iowa.

This research was supported by cooperative agreement #U59/CCU321826 from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Methods

Special Olympics Global Messengers (all current or former Special Olympics athletes) were recruited and trained to serve as interviewers, in order to:

- reduce potential distrust of the researchers by athletes and their accompanying coaches, and
- reduce social desirability bias among athletes being interviewed.

Global Messengers worked in teams with their SO mentors; Global Messengers asked questions of respondents and both they and their mentors recorded answers.



Surveys were administered to a convenience sample of athletes as they entered and exited two Healthy Athletes disciplines, Special Smiles and Health Promotion. Twenty-six athletes completed pretests and posttests at Special Smiles; 31 athletes completed pretests and posttests at Health Promotion.

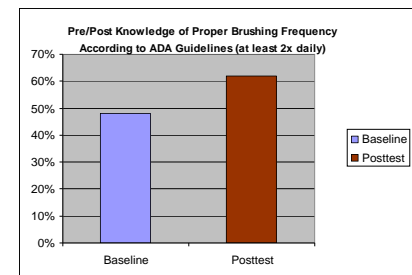
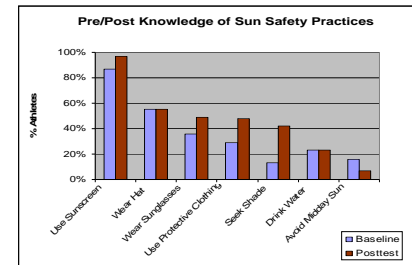
Athletes received on average 5-8 minutes of education, games and demonstrations at Special Smiles and at the Sun Safety booth at Health Promotion.

Questions were asked in an open-ended fashion to minimize social desirability bias and any impact of the pretest on posttest responses.

Results

Use of Global Messengers as Interviewers

At Special Smiles, Global Messenger/Mentor teams had an interrater reliability rate of 88 percent. At Health Promotion, the interrater reliability rate was 93 percent.



Select Survey Data

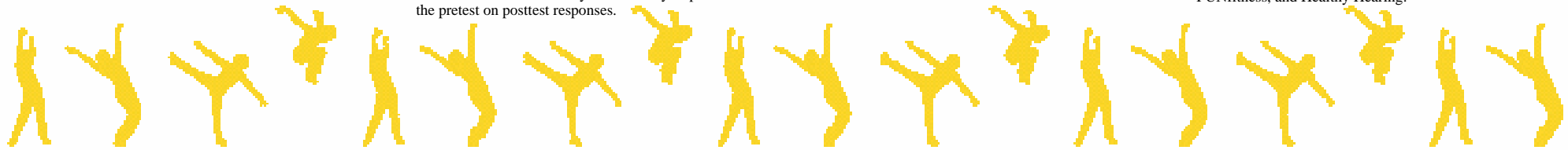
- 74% Athletes who like being out in the sun
- 19% Athletes who enjoy sun tanning
- 74% Athletes who have ever been sunburned
- 0% Athletes reporting winter sunscreen use
- 19% Athletes who do not like how sunscreen feels
- 72% Athletes who brush at least once/day
- 45% Athletes who floss
- 25% Athletes who say oral hygiene takes too much time or they would rather do other things
- 31% Athletes who had not visited a dentist in 2006
- 14% Athletes reporting oral pain during visit

Conclusions

- The high interrater reliability rates within Global Messenger/mentor interviewing teams is promising for future use of Special Olympics athletes as researchers.
- Attendance at Special Smiles and Health Promotion does result in immediate increased knowledge.

Recommendations

- Follow-up study to measure long-term knowledge and behavior changes resulting from attendance at Healthy Athletes.
- Expand sample size to allow exploration of the impact of living situation (family vs. independent living), knowledge, behaviors, and perceived barriers on health status.
- Expand study to other Healthy Athletes Disciplines, including Fit Feet, Opening Eyes, FUNfitness, and Healthy Hearing.



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