Assessing Ohio 4-H Club Healthy Living Practices: A Survey of Ohio 4-H Club Leaders

Katie Riemenschneider, MPH & Theresa M Ferrari, PhD

BACKGROUND/PURPOSE

Childhood and Adolescent Obesity
The majority of Ohio youth do not meet the guidelines for physical activity and healthy eating.
- 15.9% of Ohio high school students are overweight and 13% are considered obese.
- 18.3% of Ohio third graders are obese.
- Obesity is influenced by multiple factors including genetics, individual behaviors, and organizational structures and policies.

The promotion of healthy behaviors can be addressed through youth development organizations.

Ohio 4-H Youth Development
- The 4th H represents Health.
- 4-H recognizes the importance of health through its healthy living national mission mandate.
- However, some aspects of 4-H have yet to embrace health promotion.

Purpose: Despite a focus at the national level, little is known about practices at the club level. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of Ohio 4-H club practices related to nutrition and physical activity.

RESULTS

A sample of Ohio 4-H club leaders were surveyed about their club’s practices related to food, beverages, and physical activity. A total of 161 club leaders responded to both fixed-response and open-ended questions.

Results showed that although some practices align with health recommendations, the majority of 4-H clubs were not serving healthy foods and beverages nor allowing time for physical activity during club meetings.

Club Activities:
- 53% of clubs held fundraisers involving food items.
- Top food items sold included baked goods, hotdogs/hamburgers, candy, & pizza.
- 41% of clubs participated in community service projects with a healthy living focus.

Physical Activity Participation:
- 57% of clubs always include active ice-breakers.
- 39% of clubs always and 53% sometimes allow time for physical activity during meetings.
- The average amount of time allowed for physical activities is 20 minutes.
- Club recreation officers were most often the planners of physical activity followed by club leaders.

RECOMMENDATIONS

How can 4-H incorporate health across programs and throughout the organizational environment (see Table 1)?

Table 1: Recommendations

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<th>Recommendation</th>
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<tr>
<td>Develop lists of suggested food and beverage items that can be distributed to parents and members.</td>
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<td>Encourage and reinforce the health-related practices 4-H clubs are already doing well.</td>
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<td>Develop adaptable activities and resources for club officers and club leaders.</td>
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<td>Offer trainings and educational resources for club leaders to better integrate health in all aspects of 4-H clubs, not just projects.</td>
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<td>Conduct further research to investigate organizational readiness for change.</td>
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<td>Consider establishing state 4-H guidelines and policies related to food and beverages served and physical activity levels for 4-H clubs, camps, etc.</td>
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<td>Engage 4-H participants at all levels of the organization, including members, parents, club leaders, county educators and extension professionals, and state 4-H professionals when implementing healthy living programs.</td>
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Goal: Increase the number of Americans who are healthy at every stage of life.