

Nutrition Extension Educators' Perceptions of Evidence-based Practice

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Abstract

Excellence in nutrition education requires a strong base in research evidence. The aim of the study was to evaluate the perceived knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes, and activities of nutrition extension educators related to evidence-based practice. Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) extension agents in Florida were surveyed using an online, modified version of the Evidence-based Practice Questionnaire (EBPQ) through Qualtrics. The educators reported positive attitudes and evidence-based practice activities to support their nutrition knowledge and programming but also time constraints. Lower ratings of perceived knowledge, skills and abilities suggest a need for professional development related to evidence-based practice.

Objective

To evaluate the evidence-based practice activities, attitudes towards evidence-based practice, and perceived knowledge, skills and abilities related to evidence-based practice of FCS nutrition extension agents.

Methods

- A Qualtrics survey based on EBPQ was sent to FCS agents currently offering nutrition education in Florida
- Likert scales assessed: 1) evidenced-based practice activities over the past year (1 = never to 7 = frequently); 2) attitudes towards evidence-based practice (1 = very negative to 7 = very positive statements); and 3) knowledge, skills and abilities related to evidence-based practice (1 = poor to 5 = excellent)
- Preferred sources of evidence-based nutrition information were queried.

Results

- Twenty FCS agents responded to the survey (32% response rate)
- Undertaking evidence-based practice activities to address gaps in knowledge was rated overall at 5.2 ± 1.5 (mean ± SD) (Table 1)
- Attitudes were rated on average 5.7 ± 1.5 (Table 1)
- Perceived knowledge, skills and abilities ratings averaged 3.6 ± 0.8 (Table 2)
- Sources of evidence-based information included professional organizations, government departments, university-approved curriculum and online resources, nutrition journals, and state extension specialists.

Conclusion

FCS nutrition extension educators identify knowledge gaps, frequently seek out the relevant research, and integrate the evidence into their nutrition extension education efforts, thus strengthening their expertise and programming. However, lower ratings were reported for sharing their new knowledge with colleagues, which may suggest an opportunity for increased involvement in in-service training or conference presentations. Further, "critically appraised, against set criteria, any literature you have discovered" also was scored lower than the mean for the evidenced-based practice activities indicating a potential need for specific training to enhance their skills in critical appraisal of literature. Attitudes were overall positive, although time constraints was an impediment for some.

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SNEB Competency: 10.1

Table 1. Family and Consumer Sciences educator responses to questionnaire items of the modified Evidence-based Practice Questionnaire (EBPQ) as pertains to activities and attitudes.

Activities: Considering your nutrition extension education efforts over the past year, how often have you done the following in response to a gap in your knowledge (1 = never and 7 = frequently)	mean ± SD
Formulated a clearly answerable question as the beginning of the process towards filling this gap	5.4 ± 1.1
Tracked down the relevant evidence related to your question (gap in knowledge)	6.0 ± 0.9
Critically appraised, against set criteria, any literature you have discovered	4.6 ± 1.7
Integrated the evidence you have found with your nutrition extension education efforts	5.7 ± 1.3
Evaluated the outcomes of your nutrition extension education efforts	5.5 ± 1.6
Shared this information with colleagues	4.2 ± 1.7
Attitudes (scale 1 – 7)	
1 = My workload is too great to keep up to date with all the new nutrition evidence to 7 = New nutrition research is so important I make time in my schedule	4.4 ± 1.7
1 = I resent having my nutrition extension education efforts questioned to 7 = I welcome questions on my nutrition extension education	6.0 ± 0.9
1 = Evidence-based nutrition education is a waste of time to 7 = Evidence-based nutrition education is fundamental to extension efforts	6.8 ± 0.4
1 = I stick to tried and trusted methods rather than changing to anything new to 7 = My nutrition extension education efforts have changed due to evidence I have found	5.7 ± 1.5

Table 2. Family and Consumer Sciences educator responses to questionnaire items of the modified Evidence-based Practice Questionnaire (EBPQ) as applies to knowledge, skills, and abilities.

Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (1 = Poor and 5 = Excellent)	mean ± SD
Research skills	3.5 ± 0.8
IT skills	3.2 ± 0.9
Monitoring and reviewing of nutrition extension education skills	3.4 ± 0.6
Converting your information needs into a research question	3.0 ± 0.9
Awareness of major information types and sources	3.6 ± 0.8
Ability to identify gaps in your nutrition knowledge	3.9 ± 0.7
Knowledge of how to retrieve evidence	3.8 ± 0.6
Ability to analyse critically evidence against set standards	3.4 ± 0.9
Ability to determine how valid (close to the truth) the material is	3.6 ± 0.8
Ability to determine how useful (applicable to nutrition extension efforts) the material is	4.0 ± 0.8
Ability to apply information to nutrition extension education efforts	4.1 ± 0.7
Sharing of ideas and information with colleagues	3.7 ± 0.7
Dissemination of new ideas about nutrition extension education to colleagues	3.4 ± 0.8
Ability to review your own nutrition extension education efforts	3.6 ± 0.7