Factors Associated with Perceived Feasibility of Offering an Online Nutrition Education Program for Low-Income Adults

Darci Bell, BS, RDN, db99966@uga.edu; Brigitte A. Heron, PhD, brigo7@uga.edu; Jung Sun Lee, PhD, RDN, leejs@uga.edu

Abstract

Background: Research examining the implementation of online nutrition education programs for low-income populations is lacking. Understanding perceived feasibility and related contextual factors from the perspective of program facilitators is needed to determine best implementation practices.

Objective: To understand the perspectives of Cooperative Extension Services (CES) employees regarding perceived feasibility of implementing an online nutrition education program, Food eTalk, in their professional settings to the communities they serve.

Study Objective

To understand the perspectives of CES employees regarding perceived feasibility of implementing the UGA SNAP-Ed online nutrition education program, Food eTalk, in their professional settings to the communities they serve.

Methods

Study Design, Settings, Participants:

- In-depth, individual interviews were conducted with 15 UGA CES employees (100% female, 13.3% African American, 53.3% from urban county) interested in offering Food eTalk to their low-income clientele. The Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research (CFIR), an implementation science meta-theory for evaluating interventions, informed the development of semi-structured interview guides. Topics included nutrition education, community collaboration, and the feasibility of implementing Food eTalk through UGA CES.

Measurable Outcome/Analysis: Multi-coder data analysis included deductive coding of predefined CFIR constructs and the use of inductive methods to capture emerging themes.

Results: At the time of the interviews, most participants were offering online nutrition education programs due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Contextual factors such as organizational structure and culture, and the types of nutrition education programs UGA CES personnel currently offered to their clients played a role in perceptions of program feasibility. Adequate personnel and time to offer Food eTalk influenced perceptions of program feasibility, as well. Challenges associated with offering Food eTalk included skepticism about the effectiveness of online programs, managing multiple job responsibilities, client SNAP-Ed eligibility for Food eTalk, and concerns about client internet access.

Conclusion: While most UGA CES employees found implementing an online nutrition education program to be a feasible programming opportunity, organizational culture, structure, and target audience influenced educator perceptions of feasibility. The findings from this study will inform and guide statewide Food eTalk implementation efforts in UGA CES.

Results, Cont’d

Perceived challenges to program feasibility included:

- Participants shared concerns regarding the time and personnel needed to implement an online program alongside existing programming.
- Internet accessibility was identified as a barrier to client participation, especially by those offering programming in rural counties.
- Some participants were skeptical of a lack of in-person interaction associated with online programs that could impact client interest and motivation.
- Client SNAP-Ed eligibility arose as a concern when participants were asked to envision an ideal partnership to offer Food eTalk. A partnership that offered access to a low-income target audience was the most popular response.

Conclusions

- While most UGA CES employees found implementing an online nutrition education program to be a feasible programming opportunity, organizational culture, structure, and target audience influenced educator perceptions of feasibility.
- The findings from this study will inform and guide statewide Food eTalk implementation and dissemination efforts in UGA CES.

References


Acknowledgments

- The UGA SNAP-Ed Team and all 15 UGA CES personnel who gave their time to be interviewed.
- Questions and comments can be directed to Darci Bell, BS, RDN, db99966@uga.edu
- Funding provided by USDA SNAP-Ed