



When Health and Nature Combine: A Park Rx Community Collaborative

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RESEARCH QUESTION: What is the impact of the Santa Clara County Park Rx program on participating children and adult caregivers?

BACKGROUND: Nature provides numerous physical and mental health benefits. Communities of color experience disparities in rates of obesity, chronic disease, and mental health issues. The Latino community faces inequalities in access and exposure to nature, affecting access to nature's benefits. The Park Rx program is a collaborative between clinic, public health, and parks departments to prescribe nature to children and families through bimonthly walks at local parks.

METHODS: Children at risk for lifestyle-related illnesses receive Park Rx prescriptions from providers at a Healthy Lifestyle Clinic. From March to May 2019, we recruited caregivers and children attending Park Rx walks. We conducted surveys and focus groups with caregivers and children. Surveys assessed program satisfaction, nature experiences, and social connectedness. Caregivers completed a phone follow up survey at 3 months assessing similar items. Both caregiver and child focus groups assessed similar domains covered in the survey with additional questions regarding mental health.

RESULTS: We recruited 48 survey participants. Of the 20 caregivers, 89% were Latino, and 89% were female. Ninety-three percent strongly agreed to enjoying going to park walks, 71% strongly agreed to valuing nature's benefits, and 78% strongly agreed/agreed to connecting with others at walks. Seventy-four percent completed a follow up survey with similar findings at 3 months. The average child age was 10.4yrs (range 7-16yrs). Of the 28 children, 85% strongly agreed/agreed to liking seeing staff from clinic at walks, 75% strongly agreed to liking nature, and 79% strongly agreed to enjoying meeting others at walks. Focus groups with caregivers (n=11) and children (n=15) showed themes of increase social connectedness, opportunity for unique nature experiences, and increase stress reduction. Walks increased time for family and a chance to meet new people. Families interacted with nature in new ways. Nature was universally viewed as a way to relax.

CONCLUSION: Increasing access to nature for Latino communities can be a strategy to build social connectedness, address mental health, and reduce health disparities. Partnerships between clinics and community organizations through a collaborative and targeted park prescription program is a promising approach to promote healthy lifestyles for at risk communities.