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Cultural perception of arab american muslims parent about healthy eating and physical activity for their school age children

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Background: There is a paucity of research related to the impact of traditional diet, physical activity, cultural and religious beliefs on childhood overweight and obesity among Arab Muslim immigrant school age children in the U.S.

Purpose: The study was conducted for the following purposes: 1. To explore cultural perceptions, values and beliefs of Arab American Muslim parents or guardians of school-age children (11-14) about healthy eating and physical activity; 2. To determine the cultural perceptions, values and beliefs of Arab American Muslim parents of school-age children (ages 11-14) about healthy eating for their children; and 3. To identify the role of health care professionals in promoting culturally congruent healthy eating and activity for the school-age children (ages 11-14) through the collaborative efforts with their parents and schools.

Method: A focused ethnographic approach was used. A semi-structured and open-ended interview guide was designed to investigate and understand potential cultural and religious perceptions, values and beliefs on eating and physical activity habits for Arab American Muslim parents or guardians and their children.

Participants: A total of 32 Arab Muslim informants (parents and/or guardians) were recruited from three Islamic schools located in the Northeastern U.S. Five focus groups were conducted for data collection. Focus groups included five to 10 informants who have resided in the United States for an average of 18 years.

Data Analysis: Data was analyzed using Leininger's four phases of qualitative data analysis.

Findings: Four major themes were identified: (1) Homemade meals are healthier; (2) Arab American parents are responsible for their children's health habits; (3) Positive and negative environmental influences affect children's health habits; and (4) Cultural beliefs conflict with American customs.

Conclusion: Findings from this study suggest the importance of collaboration between schools, health care providers and parents to design and implement a culturally-tailored intervention that focus on education regarding healthy eating habits, and daily physical activities for Arab American Muslim children. In the future it will become increasingly useful and important to incorporate technological resources to promote healthy eating and activity behavior for Arab American Muslim children.

Implication: Nurses and other public health care practitioners (HCP) can use this knowledge to play a proactive role in developing culturally targeted and culturally tailored interventions focusing on the health and well-being of American-Arab Muslim children.

Biography:

Dr. Salman is specialized in Community and Public Health, with a clinical background in Medical Surgical Nursing. She earned MSN and Dr.PH degrees from the School of Nursing, and Graduate School of Public Health at the University of Pittsburgh. Currently, she is a full-time faculty member of School of Nursing at Duquesne University. She teaches at the graduate and undergraduate levels, her courses focus on population-based health promotion. Her scholarly work focuses on health promotion and disease prevention in communities with different cultural and religious backgrounds including immigrant and refugee populations, international health, and environmental health. She is a very active member in the local community, serves as an advisory member for the Department of Human Services (DHS), a member in the Immunization Coalition of the Allegheny County, and a board member in the Islamic Center of Pittsburgh.