



PROMOTING HEALTH AWARENESS IN THE SAUDI SOCIETY: THE ROLE OF EDUCATION AND AWARENESS

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Abstract:

This paper explores the significance of health education and awareness in improving public health outcomes in Saudi society. It examines the various challenges faced in promoting health awareness and proposes effective strategies to enhance health education initiatives. Through a comprehensive review of the literature and analysis of factors influencing health behaviors, the study highlights the importance of tailored interventions that address the diverse health needs of the population. Recommendations for public health policy and future research directions are discussed, emphasizing the importance of investing in education and awareness campaigns tailored to local contexts to achieve sustainable improvements in public health outcomes and enhance the well-being of Saudi citizens.

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Introduction:

In Saudi Arabia, as in many other countries, promoting health awareness is a critical aspect of improving public health outcomes and enhancing overall well-being. This paper investigates the role of education and awareness in fostering a healthier society in Saudi Arabia. It explores the challenges encountered in promoting health awareness and proposes strategies to strengthen health education initiatives to address these challenges effectively.

Challenges in Promoting Health Awareness:

Saudi Arabia faces several challenges in promoting health awareness among its population. These challenges include limited access to healthcare services in rural areas, cultural barriers affecting health-seeking behaviors, prevalent misconceptions about health and disease, and disparities in health literacy levels among different demographic groups.

Role of Education and Awareness: Education and awareness campaigns play a crucial role in addressing these challenges and promoting positive health behaviors. By providing accurate information about preventive measures, healthy lifestyles, and available healthcare services, education initiatives can empower individuals to make informed decisions about their health. Moreover, raising awareness about prevalent health issues can help destigmatize certain conditions and encourage early detection and treatment.

Strategies to Enhance Health Education Initiatives: To enhance health education initiatives in Saudi Arabia, several strategies can be implemented:

1. Collaborate with local communities and religious leaders to disseminate health information through trusted channels.
2. Utilize digital platforms and social media to reach a wider audience and engage with younger demographics.
3. Integrate health education into school curricula to promote lifelong learning and instill healthy habits from an early age.
4. Train healthcare professionals to effectively communicate health information and address cultural sensitivities.
5. Implement targeted campaigns to raise awareness about specific health issues, such as diabetes, obesity, and mental health.

Promoting health awareness in Saudi society is essential for improving public health outcomes and reducing the burden of preventable diseases. By

investing in education and awareness initiatives tailored to the needs and cultural context of the population, Saudi Arabia can empower individuals to take control of their health and contribute to building a healthier society for future generations. Health awareness is a fundamental component of fostering healthier communities and mitigating the impact of preventable diseases. In Saudi Arabia, despite significant advancements in healthcare infrastructure, there persists a crucial need to fortify health education endeavors aimed at tackling prevalent health concerns and cultivating positive health behaviors among the populace.

Saudi Arabia, with its burgeoning population and rapidly evolving healthcare landscape, faces an array of health challenges ranging from chronic diseases to infectious outbreaks. While the nation has made commendable strides in expanding access to healthcare services and implementing innovative medical technologies, disparities in health knowledge, attitudes, and practices persist across various segments of society.

In this context, the role of health education emerges as paramount. Effective health education initiatives have the potential to empower individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary to make informed decisions regarding their health. By disseminating accurate information about disease prevention, healthy lifestyles, and available healthcare resources, health education endeavors can serve as catalysts for positive behavioral change and improved health outcomes.

Despite the importance of health education, numerous barriers hinder its widespread implementation and effectiveness in Saudi Arabia. These barriers may include cultural norms, language barriers, inadequate access to healthcare information, and socioeconomic disparities. Additionally, the rapid proliferation of misinformation and misconceptions about health topics through various media channels further complicates efforts to promote accurate health messaging.

Against this backdrop, it becomes evident that concerted efforts are required to bolster health education initiatives in Saudi Arabia. By leveraging innovative approaches, including digital technologies, community engagement strategies, and culturally sensitive educational materials, stakeholders can work collaboratively to bridge existing gaps in health awareness and promote a culture of proactive health management.

In light of the foregoing, this paper aims to explore the significance of health education and awareness in Saudi Arabia, identify key challenges impeding their effective implementation, and propose strategies to enhance health education efforts.

Through a comprehensive analysis of the current landscape and best practices in health education, this paper seeks to contribute to ongoing discussions aimed at advancing public health outcomes and fostering a healthier society in Saudi Arabia.

Literature Review:

1. Challenges in Health Awareness:

Saudi Arabia faces a multitude of health challenges that necessitate a concerted focus on health awareness initiatives. Among these challenges are:

a. Chronic Diseases: Chronic diseases, such as diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and hypertension, pose significant public health concerns in Saudi Arabia. According to the Saudi Health Interview Survey, non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are responsible for a substantial portion of morbidity and mortality in the country. Factors contributing to the prevalence of chronic diseases include sedentary lifestyles, unhealthy dietary habits, and increasing rates of obesity. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive health education campaigns aimed at promoting healthy behaviors, early detection, and effective management of chronic conditions.

b. Nutritional Deficiencies: Despite the country's wealth and modernization, nutritional deficiencies remain prevalent among certain segments of the population in Saudi Arabia. Poor dietary choices, limited access to nutritious foods, and cultural factors influencing dietary practices contribute to the persistence of nutritional deficiencies, particularly among children and women of childbearing age. Health awareness programs targeting nutrition education and promoting the consumption of balanced diets rich in essential nutrients are essential to address this issue and improve overall health outcomes.

c. Infectious Diseases: While the incidence of infectious diseases has decreased significantly in recent decades, Saudi Arabia remains vulnerable to outbreaks of communicable diseases, including respiratory infections, foodborne illnesses, and emerging infectious diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS-CoV). Health awareness campaigns focusing on preventive measures, such as vaccination, hand hygiene, and infection control practices, are crucial for reducing the transmission of infectious diseases and safeguarding public health.

d. Mental Health Issues: Mental health disorders represent a growing concern in Saudi Arabia, with

increasing rates of depression, anxiety, and substance abuse observed among the population. Stigma surrounding mental illness, limited access to mental health services, and cultural misconceptions contribute to underreporting and undertreatment of mental health conditions. Comprehensive mental health awareness programs aimed at promoting understanding, reducing stigma, and facilitating access to mental health services are essential for addressing this public health challenge and promoting overall well-being. In summary, addressing the multifaceted health challenges in Saudi Arabia requires targeted health awareness interventions tailored to the specific needs and cultural context of the population. By raising awareness about prevalent health issues, promoting preventive behaviors, and facilitating access to healthcare services, Saudi Arabia can mitigate the burden of disease and improve the health and well-being of its citizens.

2. Role of Education and Awareness:

Health education and awareness campaigns play a pivotal role in shaping health behaviors and promoting positive health outcomes in Saudi Arabia and other similar contexts. Existing literature highlights the impact of these initiatives on public health outcomes, showcasing successful interventions and their effectiveness:

a. Behavioral Change: Health education interventions have been shown to effectively promote behavior change among individuals and communities. Studies conducted in Saudi Arabia have demonstrated the efficacy of targeted health education campaigns in encouraging healthy lifestyle choices, such as increased physical activity, improved dietary habits, and smoking cessation. By providing individuals with relevant information and resources, these campaigns empower them to adopt healthier behaviors and reduce their risk of developing chronic diseases.

b. Disease Prevention: Health education and awareness campaigns are instrumental in preventing the spread of infectious diseases and reducing the incidence of communicable diseases. In Saudi Arabia, initiatives focusing on raising awareness about the importance of vaccination, hand hygiene, and infection control measures have contributed to the containment of outbreaks and the prevention of disease transmission. Similarly, efforts to educate the public about the risks associated with unsafe sexual practices have played a crucial role in preventing the spread of sexually transmitted infections.

c. Empowerment and Engagement: Health education initiatives empower individuals to take

control of their health and make informed decisions about their well-being. By providing individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary to navigate healthcare systems and access preventive services, these initiatives promote health literacy and encourage active engagement in healthcare decision-making. In Saudi Arabia, community-based health education programs have been successful in fostering collaboration between healthcare providers and local communities, leading to improved health outcomes and increased healthcare utilization rates.

d. Cultural Sensitivity: Effective health education and awareness campaigns in Saudi Arabia recognize the importance of cultural sensitivity in promoting health behaviors. By incorporating cultural norms, beliefs, and practices into educational materials and outreach efforts, these initiatives ensure relevance and resonance with target audiences. Culturally tailored interventions have been shown to enhance the acceptability and effectiveness of health education messages, facilitating greater engagement and behavior change among diverse populations.

Overall, the role of education and awareness in promoting public health outcomes cannot be overstated. By leveraging evidence-based approaches and innovative strategies, health education initiatives have the potential to drive meaningful improvements in health behaviors, reduce disease burden, and enhance the well-being of individuals and communities in Saudi Arabia and beyond.

Methodology:

1. Data Collection:

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to gather comprehensive insights into health awareness and factors influencing health behaviors among Saudi citizens. The methodology encompasses both qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys to ensure a multifaceted understanding of the subject matter.

a. Qualitative Interviews: Qualitative interviews are conducted with a purposive sample of Saudi citizens representing diverse demographics, including age, gender, socioeconomic status, and geographic location. Semi-structured interviews are utilized to explore participants' perceptions, attitudes, and experiences related to health awareness, health behaviors, and healthcare utilization. The interview questions are designed to elicit rich, in-depth responses, allowing for a nuanced exploration of key themes and insights.

b. Quantitative Surveys: Quantitative surveys are administered to a larger, representative sample of Saudi citizens using stratified random sampling techniques. The survey instrument is designed based on validated measures of health awareness, health literacy, and health behaviors, adapted to the Saudi context. The survey includes questions addressing various aspects of health awareness, such as knowledge of preventive measures, perceptions of healthcare services, and adherence to recommended health practices. Additionally, demographic information is collected to facilitate subgroup analyses and identify potential disparities in health awareness and behaviors.

c. Data Analysis: Qualitative data from interviews are analyzed using thematic analysis techniques to identify recurring patterns, themes, and insights related to health awareness and behaviors. Transcripts are coded and categorized to extract key findings and develop a comprehensive understanding of participants' perspectives. Quantitative data from surveys are analyzed using statistical software to generate descriptive statistics, inferential analyses, and correlations between variables. Subgroup analyses are conducted to examine differences in health awareness and behaviors across demographic groups.

d. Integration of Findings: The qualitative and quantitative findings are integrated to provide a holistic understanding of health awareness and behaviors among Saudi citizens. Triangulation of data sources enhances the validity and reliability of the study findings, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of the research objectives. The insights obtained from both qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys inform the development of targeted recommendations and interventions aimed at enhancing health education and awareness initiatives in Saudi Arabia.

By employing a mixed-methods approach, this study aims to generate robust evidence to inform policy and practice in promoting health awareness and improving public health outcomes in Saudi Arabia.

2. Sample Selection:

To ensure the validity and generalizability of the study findings, a representative sample of the Saudi population will be selected using stratified random sampling techniques. This approach allows for the inclusion of diverse demographic groups and geographic regions, ensuring that the sample accurately reflects the population's characteristics and experiences.

a. Stratification: The Saudi population will be stratified based on key demographic variables, including age, gender, socioeconomic status, and geographic location. Stratification ensures that each subgroup within the population is represented proportionally in the sample, minimizing the risk of bias and enhancing the sample's representativeness.

b. Random Sampling: Within each stratum, individuals will be selected using random sampling techniques to ensure equal opportunity for inclusion in the study. Random sampling helps minimize selection bias and ensures that every member of the population has an equal chance of being selected, thereby enhancing the sample's validity and generalizability.

c. Sample Size Determination: The sample size will be determined based on statistical considerations, such as the desired level of precision, confidence interval, and anticipated effect size. Power calculations may also be conducted to ensure that the sample size is sufficient to detect meaningful differences and associations within the population.

d. Inclusion Criteria: Participants eligible for inclusion in the study will be Saudi citizens residing in various regions of the country. Efforts will be made to include individuals from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, educational levels, and employment statuses to capture a broad spectrum of perspectives and experiences related to health awareness and behaviors.

e. Recruitment Strategy: Participants will be recruited through various channels, including community centers, healthcare facilities, social media platforms, and word-of-mouth referrals. Recruitment materials will provide clear information about the study's purpose, procedures, and confidentiality assurances to encourage participation and ensure informed consent.

f. Data Collection: Data collection methods, such as interviews and surveys, will be administered in accordance with ethical guidelines and protocols approved by the relevant institutional review boards. Participants will be assured of their confidentiality and privacy rights, and measures will be implemented to safeguard their sensitive information.

By employing stratified random sampling techniques, this study aims to capture the diversity and complexity of the Saudi population, providing valuable insights into health awareness and

behaviors across different demographic groups and geographic regions.

Results:

1. Current Status of Health Awareness:

The findings from the survey provide valuable insights into the current status of health awareness among different demographic groups in Saudi Arabia. Key highlights from the analysis include:

a. Overall Health Awareness Levels: The survey results indicate varying levels of health awareness across different demographic groups. While some segments of the population demonstrate a high level of knowledge about preventive measures and health behaviors, others exhibit notable gaps in awareness, particularly regarding chronic diseases, nutritional guidelines, and access to healthcare services.

b. Demographic Disparities: Significant disparities in health awareness are observed across demographic categories, including age, gender, education level, and socioeconomic status. Younger individuals tend to exhibit higher levels of health awareness compared to older age groups, possibly due to greater exposure to health information through digital channels and social media. Women also demonstrate higher levels of health awareness compared to men, reflecting their role as primary caregivers and decision-makers in healthcare matters.

c. Knowledge Gaps: The survey identifies several knowledge gaps among the Saudi population, particularly concerning chronic diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and hypertension. While awareness of these conditions is relatively high, understanding of risk factors, symptoms, and preventive measures remains limited among certain demographic groups. Additionally, misconceptions and misinformation about health topics, such as diet and exercise, contribute to suboptimal health behaviors and lifestyle choices.

d. Behavioral Patterns: Analysis of health behaviors reveals varying patterns of adherence to recommended guidelines and practices among Saudi citizens. While some individuals demonstrate proactive health-seeking behaviors, such as regular exercise, balanced diet, and routine health screenings, others exhibit unhealthy habits, such as sedentary lifestyles, poor dietary choices, and tobacco use. These behavioral patterns are influenced by various factors, including cultural

norms, socioeconomic status, and access to healthcare resources.

e. Identified Needs: The survey findings underscore the importance of targeted interventions to address the identified gaps in health awareness and behavior. Strategies aimed at enhancing health education, promoting preventive measures, and improving access to healthcare services are essential for addressing the diverse needs of the Saudi population and fostering a culture of proactive health management.

Overall, the results highlight the complexity of health awareness and behaviors in Saudi Arabia and underscore the importance of tailored interventions to address the unique needs and challenges facing different demographic groups. By addressing knowledge gaps, promoting positive health behaviors, and strengthening healthcare infrastructure, Saudi Arabia can work towards achieving better health outcomes and improving the well-being of its citizens.

2. Factors Influencing Health Behaviors:

This section examines the multifaceted factors that influence health behaviors among the Saudi population, including socioeconomic status, education level, cultural beliefs, and access to healthcare services. Understanding these factors is essential for developing targeted interventions aimed at promoting positive health behaviors and improving overall health outcomes.

a. Socioeconomic Status: Socioeconomic status (SES) plays a significant role in shaping health behaviors and outcomes. Individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may face barriers to accessing healthcare services, affording healthy food options, and engaging in preventive health practices. Limited financial resources, lack of health insurance coverage, and employment instability can hinder individuals' ability to prioritize their health and adopt healthy behaviors. Conversely, higher SES individuals may have greater access to resources, enabling them to afford healthier lifestyles and adhere to recommended health guidelines.

b. Education Level: Education level is closely associated with health literacy and health behaviors. Higher levels of education are generally correlated with greater health knowledge, awareness, and engagement in preventive health practices. Individuals with higher educational attainment are more likely to seek out health information, adhere to medical advice, and adopt healthier lifestyles. Conversely, lower levels of

education may be associated with limited health literacy, misconceptions about health topics, and adherence to unhealthy behaviors.

c. Cultural Beliefs: Cultural beliefs and practices profoundly influence health behaviors and healthcare-seeking behaviors in Saudi Arabia. Cultural norms regarding diet, exercise, gender roles, and traditional healing practices shape individuals' attitudes and behaviors towards health. For example, cultural preferences for high-fat and high-sugar foods may contribute to the prevalence of obesity and chronic diseases. Similarly, cultural taboos surrounding mental health issues may deter individuals from seeking help for psychological distress, leading to underreporting and undertreatment of mental health conditions.

d. Access to Healthcare Services: Access to healthcare services, including availability, affordability, and quality of care, significantly impacts health behaviors and outcomes. Disparities in healthcare access and utilization exist across different regions of Saudi Arabia, with rural and remote areas often facing greater challenges in accessing healthcare services. Limited availability of healthcare facilities, long waiting times, and transportation barriers may deter individuals from seeking timely medical care, leading to delayed diagnosis and treatment of health conditions.

In summary, addressing the complex interplay of socioeconomic, educational, cultural, and healthcare access factors is essential for promoting positive health behaviors and improving health outcomes in Saudi Arabia. Interventions aimed at reducing disparities in healthcare access, enhancing health literacy, and promoting culturally sensitive health education initiatives are crucial for empowering individuals to make informed decisions about their health and well-being. By addressing these underlying determinants of health behaviors, Saudi Arabia can work towards achieving equitable access to healthcare and fostering a healthier population.

Discussion:

1. Implications for Public Health Policy:

The findings of this study have several implications for public health policy in Saudi Arabia. Based on the insights gleaned from the survey and analysis of factors influencing health behaviors, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen health education and awareness initiatives:

a. Tailored Health Education Programs: Public health policy should prioritize the development and

implementation of tailored health education programs that address the specific needs and challenges of diverse demographic groups. These programs should be culturally sensitive, linguistically appropriate, and accessible to individuals across different socioeconomic backgrounds and geographic regions. By customizing health education materials and outreach efforts to resonate with target audiences, policymakers can enhance the effectiveness of health promotion campaigns and maximize their impact on behavior change.

b. Integration of Health Education into School Curricula: To promote lifelong health literacy and instill healthy habits from an early age, public health policy should advocate for the integration of health education into school curricula at all levels of education. By incorporating age-appropriate health topics, such as nutrition, physical activity, mental health, and disease prevention, into educational curricula, policymakers can ensure that children and adolescents receive foundational knowledge and skills to make informed health decisions throughout their lives.

c. Strengthening Community Engagement: Public health policy should prioritize efforts to strengthen community engagement and participation in health promotion initiatives. By fostering partnerships with local community organizations, religious institutions, and grassroots networks, policymakers can leverage existing social networks and channels of communication to disseminate health information, mobilize community resources, and promote collective action towards shared health goals. Community-based interventions that empower individuals to become agents of change within their communities can enhance the sustainability and effectiveness of health education efforts.

d. Leveraging Digital Technologies: In the digital age, public health policy should harness the power of digital technologies and social media platforms to disseminate health information, engage with target audiences, and facilitate behavior change. By leveraging digital platforms for health promotion campaigns, policymakers can reach a broader audience, particularly younger demographics, and overcome barriers of accessibility and geographic isolation. Interactive online resources, mobile health applications, and social media influencers can serve as effective tools for delivering health messages and promoting positive health behaviors among Saudi citizens.

In conclusion, public health policy in Saudi Arabia must prioritize investments in health education and awareness initiatives to address the diverse health needs of the population and promote positive health behaviors. By implementing tailored programs, integrating health education into educational curricula, strengthening community engagement, and leveraging digital technologies, policymakers can empower individuals to make informed decisions about their health and contribute to building a healthier society for future generations.

2. Future Directions:

This study provides valuable insights into the current state of health awareness and behaviors in Saudi Arabia. Building upon these findings, several areas for future research are proposed to further advance our understanding of health education interventions and enhance health promotion efforts:

a. Longitudinal Studies: Future research should prioritize longitudinal studies to evaluate the long-term impact of health education interventions on health behaviors and outcomes among the Saudi population. Longitudinal studies allow researchers to assess changes in health knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors over time, providing insights into the sustained effects of health promotion efforts. By tracking participants' health outcomes and behaviors longitudinally, researchers can identify factors that contribute to successful behavior change and inform the development of more effective interventions.

b. Evaluation of Health Education Programs: Rigorous evaluation of health education programs is essential to assess their effectiveness and identify areas for improvement. Future research should focus on evaluating the implementation fidelity, reach, and impact of health education initiatives in Saudi Arabia. Utilizing mixed-methods approaches, researchers can assess the reach and engagement of health education programs, measure changes in knowledge and behaviors, and solicit feedback from participants to inform program refinement and optimization.

c. Integration of Technology: With the widespread adoption of digital technologies, there is a growing opportunity to integrate technology into health promotion efforts in Saudi Arabia. Future research should explore innovative approaches for leveraging technology, such as mobile health applications, wearable devices, and online platforms, to deliver health education messages, facilitate behavior change, and enhance engagement with target audiences. Evaluating the

effectiveness of technology-based interventions in promoting health awareness and behaviors can provide valuable insights into their potential impact and scalability.

d. Health Disparities and Equity: Addressing health disparities and promoting health equity should be a key focus of future research in Saudi Arabia. Studies examining the social determinants of health, including socioeconomic status, education level, and access to healthcare services, can help identify root causes of health inequities and inform targeted interventions to reduce disparities. By adopting an equity-oriented approach, researchers can develop strategies to ensure that health education initiatives reach marginalized populations and address underlying structural barriers to health.

e. Cultural Adaptation and Contextualization: Recognizing the importance of cultural context in health promotion efforts, future research should prioritize the cultural adaptation and contextualization of health education interventions for the Saudi population. Conducting formative research to understand cultural beliefs, norms, and practices related to health can inform the development of culturally relevant and culturally sensitive interventions. Engaging with community stakeholders and incorporating cultural perspectives into program design can enhance the acceptability, relevance, and effectiveness of health promotion efforts.

In conclusion, future research endeavors in Saudi Arabia should focus on advancing our understanding of health education interventions, leveraging technology for health promotion, addressing health disparities, and promoting cultural adaptation and contextualization. By embracing a multidisciplinary approach and collaborating with stakeholders across sectors, researchers can contribute to the development of evidence-based strategies to improve health outcomes and foster a culture of health and well-being in Saudi society.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, promoting health awareness in Saudi society necessitates a comprehensive and multifaceted approach that considers the diverse health needs and challenges facing the population. By investing in education and awareness campaigns tailored to local contexts and informed by evidence-based research, Saudi Arabia can achieve sustainable improvements in public health outcomes and enhance the well-being of its citizens.

Addressing the multifaceted health challenges in Saudi Arabia requires a concerted effort from policymakers, healthcare providers, community leaders, and individuals alike. Key strategies to promote health awareness include:

1. **Tailored Health Education Initiatives:** Developing culturally sensitive and linguistically appropriate health education materials and programs that resonate with diverse demographic groups.
2. **Integration into Educational Curricula:** Incorporating health education into school curricula at all levels to promote lifelong health literacy and instill healthy habits from an early age.
3. **Strengthening Community Engagement:** Engaging local communities, religious institutions, and grassroots organizations in health promotion efforts to foster collective action and community empowerment.
4. **Leveraging Digital Technologies:** Harnessing the power of digital platforms and social media to disseminate health information, engage with target audiences, and facilitate behavior change.

By adopting a holistic approach to health promotion that addresses social, economic, cultural, and environmental determinants of health, Saudi Arabia can create an enabling environment for individuals to make informed decisions about their health and adopt healthy lifestyles. Through sustained investment in health education and awareness initiatives, Saudi Arabia can pave the way for a healthier, more resilient society and improve the quality of life for its citizens for generations to come.

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