A Community Needs Assessment for the Healthy Corner Stores Project in Trenton, NJ

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Introduction

- Childhood obesity in Trenton exceeds national averages
- U.S. prevalence: 17% 
- Trenton prevalence: 28%
- Trenton’s unhealthy “food environment” may contribute to the city’s disparate rates of obesity 
- High density of corner stores 
- Few supermarkets within city limits

Needs Assessment Goals:
- To determine participating corner stores’ nutritional needs based on their current inventory
- To describe corner store customers’ purchasing habits
- To identify perceived barriers to buying healthy food within each targeted neighborhood

Methods

- Store baseline assessments
  - Systematically catalogued the varieties of beverages, fruits, vegetables, grains, produce, dairy, snacks, and sweets 
  - Classified fresh produce items as “satisfactory” or “needs improvement” based on predetermined definitions of the terms 
  - Interviewed store owners about barriers to stocking healthy food
- Customer surveys 
  - Interviewed a convenience sample of customers (face-to-face) 
  - Determined frequency of corner store shopping, distance traveled from home, and typical purchases 
  - Evaluated satisfaction with the availability and affordability of healthy food in each neighborhood

Results

- Store baseline assessments (n=3)
  - As expected, stores offered a limited selection of healthy food and beverages, like whole grains, skim milk, and water, and an abundance of fatty, sugary, and/or calorically-dense items

Figure 4. Beverages available

Figure 5. Grains available

Table 1. Demographic summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Male (%)</th>
<th>Female (%)</th>
<th>Hispanic (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>55+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>53.0%</td>
<td>47.0%</td>
<td>55.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole grain</td>
<td>31.0%</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corn</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruits and Vegetables</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milk</td>
<td>50.3%</td>
<td>41.1%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6. Milk varieties available

Figure 7. Number of fruit and vegetable varieties

- Customer surveys (n=42)
  - Most customers (62.9%) were between the ages of 18-34 
  - Hispanic customers made up the majority of respondents (57.1%), followed closely by non-Hispanic, Black customers (31.0%)
  - Customers live very close to the corner stores and visit quite frequently
  - 66.7% live within five blocks
  - 35.7% shop in the corner store every day

Figure 8. Frequency of corner store shopping

Discussion

- A large percentage of individuals shop in corner stores every day
  - Introducing healthy food into the stores increases the “convenience” of purchasing these items and might lead to increased consumption
  - Most customers leave their neighborhood to buy certain food products 
  - Presents a barrier for residents with no transportation 
  - Bringing these items to the corner stores can potentially increase revenue for corner store owners

- Introducing healthy food is just one piece of the puzzle
  - Health education, fair pricing, and attractive presentation are essential for program success and sustainability

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