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“What does being healthy mean to you” An exploration of health beliefs on Eleuthera, The Bahamas



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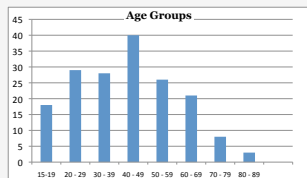
Background & Purpose

The Ministry of Health of The Bahamas’ Lifestyles Initiative aimed to reduce illness, disability and death related to lifestyle-related disease. As part of a student immersion project to evaluate this initiative, we asked Bahamian men and women to share their perceptions of and beliefs about health.



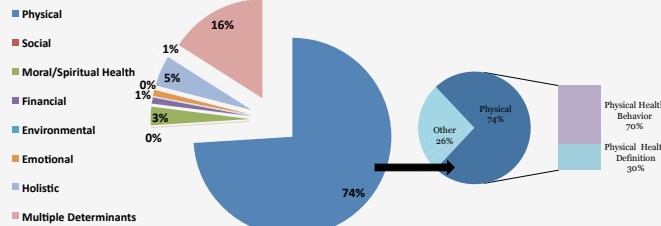
Methods

Interviews were conducted from a convenience sample over a two-week period. Respondents (N= 174) 15-85 years old and able to understand and speak English were interviewed at community gathering sites in 12 settlements. They were asked: “What does being healthy or having a healthy lifestyle mean to you?” Health definitions were coded for content by four members of the team .



Results

300 responses from 174 people were coded into 23 categories. Responses linked to Physical Health were predominant. Of responses relating to physical health 70% were related to behaviors, such as diet, exercise, and sleep, while 30% were related to true definitions of health.



Themes	Total Number	Percentage of Total Responses	Percentage of People
Diet	86	29	49
Exercise	63	21	36
Not Being Sick, No Pain	23	8	13
Hygiene	3	1	2
Religion/Moral	8	3	5
Finances	1	0	1
Not Sure	3	1	2
Other/Uninterpretable	22	7	13
“Feeling Good”	8	3	5
Sleep	4	1	2
Bush Medicine	2	1	1
Water	5	2	3
Holistic	7	2	4
Mental Health	7	2	4
Longevity	9	3	5
Able to Fulfill Duties of Job/Family/Etc	13	4	7
Being in Shape/Fit	22	7	13
No Drugs or Alcohol	7	2	4
Disease Specific (including biomasurements like BP, weight, etc.)	13	4	7
Seeking Healthcare	3	1	2

Discussion

Results of the interviews revealed a “narrow” conception of “being healthy.” Absence or infrequency of mention of themes may point direction for future health education campaigns.

Physical

- Diet (29%) and exercise (21%): Important on an island where hypertension and diabetes are a growing epidemic.
- No pain (8%): reflects an emphasis on the absence of illness, rather than on the presence of health.
- Being fit (7%): focus on appearance of health as well as an experience of health

Moral/Spiritual:

- Definitions of health relating to spirituality or moral health were much less common than expected. Many Eleutherans also use prayer as their first line of healthcare.

Financial, Environmental, Mental & Social:

- Lack of availability, access, and resources
- Significant pollution and environmental damage, but no noticeable “green” movement.
- Health not viewed holistically, so no comprehensive framework for health promotion, education, and disease prevention.

Limitations

The convenience sample used in this study is not generalizable to the Eleuthera population as a whole. There was also a wide range of interpretation of the question asked. Many answers were ambiguous and difficult to code. There were also several responses in which the cultural meaning of the language used was unclear.



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