

Evaluation of literacy among refugee patients and subsequent effect of providing books.

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Introduction

- Reading aloud to children at a very young age is a delightful experience that augments the development of language and other developing literacy skills which in turn helps children get ready for school (1).
- Development skills are further enhanced because adults use more complex language when interacting with children around a book (2). Books provide an opportunity for dedicated and pleasurable interaction between parents and child and supports child's literacy development, social, emotional development, memory, curiosity, fine motor skills, potentiates joint attention, which stimulates imagination and describes feelings.
- A US national survey showed that 16% of parents of children aged under 3 do not read to their children at all while 23 % do so only once or twice a week (5).
- Key contributors to reading readiness are exposure to words and subsequent vocabulary. However, enormous social class differences have been reported .
- At the age of 3, children from professional families, middle class and welfare recipients were exposed to 2153, 1251 and 616 words an hour respectively (4).
- Needless to say, minorities are well represented among the approximately 20 % of Americans who are functionally illiterate, defined as reading at the 5th grade level (3).
- Among our refugees from Africa who also occupy the low echelons of socioeconomic order, information is passed by word of mouth and a reading culture is historically a preserve of the elite. Subsequently, their children are often at a disadvantage when it comes to school readiness because of their parents' literacy levels.
- In this research project, we endeavor to gauge literacy levels among Kiswahili speaking patients and find out whether this patient population reads to their children. We also endeavor to find out whether prescribing books to this population changes their reading habits

Methods

Ten Kiswahili speaking families with at least one child under the age of five were recruited for the study. A questionnaire was designed to evaluate the level of literacy among the parents as well as find out how much the parents read to their children. The questionnaire was administered over the phone or face to face at the beginning of the study and two months after thirty books were provided to each family. Parents were instructed that reading to their children would enhance school readiness.

Questionnaire

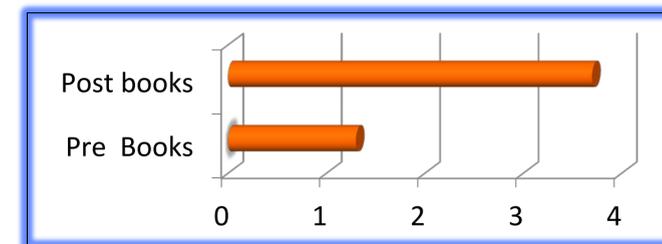
PREINTERVENTION QUESTIONS

- How many books do you read to your child(ren) every day or evening?
- In what language do you read to your child?
- Are you able to read in English?
- Are you able to read in Kiswahili?
- Do you prefer reading in English or Kiswahili?
- Who predominantly takes care of your children? What language do they speak? Do they read to the children?
- What is the parents' education level?
- On a scale of 1-10, how important is it to read to your children?
- Do you find yourself reading to the boys or girls more or is it about the same for both genders?
- If you do not read to your children, what keeps you from reading to them?

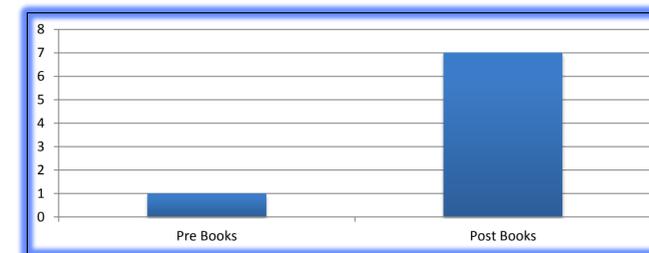
POSTINTERVENTION QUESTIONS:

- How many books do you read to your child(ren) every day or evening?
- How many times a week do you read to them?

Results



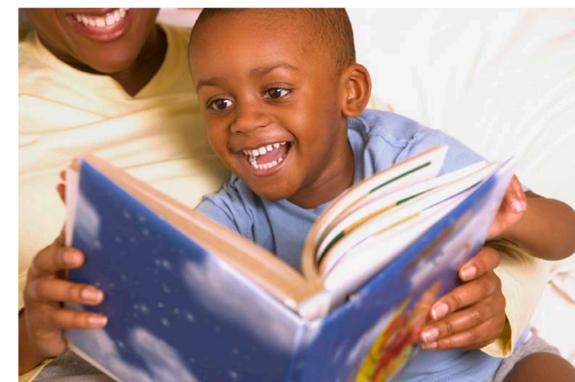
Reading frequency per week



Number of books read per week

Conclusion

Our study suggests that book provision to parents with young children increases parent-child book sharing at home. Continued investment in early literacy promotion in clinics that serve the underprivileged children is vital. Despite stressors of life, our Kiswahili patients are receptive to reading to their children since they now understand that this prepares them to be school-ready



Discussion

- The Reach Out and Read (ROR) program has helped attenuate book exposure disparity between socioeconomic classes.
- Three studies have demonstrated that parents whose children were given books by their pediatrician were significantly more likely to report positive book sharing behaviors than controls. (6,7,8).
- We found that with provision of books, parents reported an increase in the number of books as well as the weekly frequency that parents read to their children.
- All families read both English and Kiswahili books with no regard to child gender.
- Study limitations include very small sample size.
- Responses were confounded by parents inclination to provide socially desirable answers, rendering the reported outcomes parental perceptions rather than parental behavior.

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