

Staying Connected with Social Media during Social Distancing

Authors: Mamata Pandey, PhD¹; Rejina Kamrul^{2*}; Andrea Vasquez Camargo²; Clara Rocha Michaels²; Neelu Sachdev³

Affiliation:

¹Saskatchewan Health Authority

²Department of Family Medicine, University of Saskatchewan

³Regina Immigrant Women Center

Abstract:

Context:

Effective strategies in communication of health risks are essential to protect communities during this rapidly evolving COVID-19 pandemic. Language barriers, social, economic and cultural factors can limit newcomers' compliance with public health directives. Due to imposed physical distancing, many settlement agencies have suspended in-person services, and access to credible information is challenging for newcomers. This leads to perplexity and anxiety, putting newcomers in an increasing vulnerable position.

Objective:

The objective of the study was to provide credible and easily comprehensible information, helping newcomers to better comply with the public health directives implemented to manage the COVID-19 pandemic.

Design:

Language-assisted information workshops were delivered virtually between July 2020 – April 2021 in collaboration with Regina Immigrant Women Center. Adherence to public health directives and intervention effectiveness was explored through three focus groups.

Participants:

Forty nine newcomers aged 20 years and older whose length of stay in Canada was less than 5 years attended.

Intervention:

Health information on COVID-19 included related risks, prevention, physical distancing, general information on vaccines, and the provincial vaccine roll-out plan. Additionally, strategies to maintain physical, social and mental health were presented. At the request of the participants, two additional workshops on mental health were provided.

Results:

The participants were compliant with public health directives such as masking in public places, usage of hand sanitizers, and physical distancing. Vaccine acceptability and compliance with provincial vaccine roll-out were high. The workshops were well received, and the participants were satisfied with the informational content. Many participants expressed difficulty adjusting to government mandated restrictions. Also listed as challenges were the combined effects of social

isolation and adjusting to a new country during the pandemic. Many of the participants exhibited some uncertainty of their future given a perceived lack of options, exacerbated by the pandemic.

Conclusion:

Language-assisted workshops were effective in disseminating public health directives, and engaging vulnerable groups in following such measures. The interactive workshops allowed information to be tailored towards specific needs of newcomers. It is noted that the participants themselves requested additional workshops on mental health and stress management; This highlights the impact of the pandemic on mental wellbeing.