

Can the Health Club be Used Effectively to Promote Healthy Lifestyles? A Comparison of Health Club Members and Community Controls in Khayelitsha, Cape Town

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ABSTRACT In response to the increasing need to reduce the burden associated with chronic non-communicable diseases, a health club was developed in 2002 to promote healthy lifestyles in Khayelitsha, an urban township in Cape Town. The current study assessed the effectiveness of the health club in promoting healthy living by comparing club members practices of physical activity and eating habits with community controls. It also identified perceived barriers and enhancing factors in both groups. Data was collected through interviews using structured questionnaires. Fewer health club members (8%) than non-members (23%) walked for more than 30 minutes daily ($p=0.025$). Members were in general more active than non-members. Members (28%) spent more time than non- members (8%) engaged in light intensity daily activities for more than 2 hours ($p=0.029$). Fifty- eight percent of members and 20% of non-members spent more than 3 hours daily engaged in moderate physical activity ($p=0.002$). Members mostly made healthier food choices and cooking methods than non- members. Sixty- nine percent of club members always trimmed fat from red meat whereas 79 percent of non-members never trimmed fat ($p = 0.000$). More non-members (96%) than members (39%) ate soft rather than hard margarine ($p=0.000$). Thirty- six percent of members and 5 percent of non-members consumed less than 2 teaspoons of sugar in their tea/coffee ($p= 0.000$). This study indicates that the health club had a positive effect in influencing healthy living among its members. However, socio-economic and environmental factors pose significant barriers in the adoption of healthy behaviours.