

Abstract

Research question: Does the language barrier of French minorities in Canada impact the quality of healthcare, specifically dietetic services?

Methods: PubMed was searched using the keywords: language barrier, French minorities/health, entry to practice, competencies, knowledge gap/nutrition, entry to practice/dietitian education/need. The search was open to all literature, with no specific date limit. The articles were limited to studies in Canada.

Results: Out of 31 articles, 18 were analysed, of which 5 were peer-reviewed or based on peer-reviewed articles. The study demonstrated that there is a language barrier in the health care system affecting French minorities. Two studies were quantitative and 3 were qualitative. The recurring topics in the literature were: insufficient access to French services which was determined by 5 studies, lack of bilingual health professionals in 5 studies and the challenges faced by health professionals was assessed in 3 studies. The populations most affected by the language barrier according to 5 of the studies were the elderly. A review of the grey literature established that although the CNFS has increased health programs offered in French the needs of the French minority are not being met. In like manner, access to dietetic services is insufficient across Canada.

Conclusion: The language barrier continues to impact care for French minorities. Most articles reviewed described the effect of the language barrier on health care in general. Thus, further research must be conducted to determine the direct impact on dietetic services.

Significance to the field of dietetics: Supporting French minorities requires understanding the health-related challenges they face.

Introduction

According to the Office of Commissioners of Official Languages, the official languages of Canada are French and English. Although both languages are spoken throughout the country the French population is considered to be a minority with only 20.6% of the population having French as their mother tongue (Statistics Canada, 2017).

A language barrier is when differences in language impact communication. The impact of the language barrier affects individuals access to care on many different levels such as accessibility, continuity of services, patient safety, patient empowerment, effectiveness and efficiency of the healthcare system (*Réseau des services de santé en français de l'Est de l'Ontario*, 2012).



Methods and Materials

- PubMed and other databases were searched using the keywords and combinations: language barrier, French minorities/health, entry to practice, competencies, knowledge gap/nutrition, entry to practice/dietitian education/need.
- The *Réseau des services de santé en français de l'est de l'Ontario*, Dietitians of Canada, Health Canada, Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, and the *Consortium national de formation en santé* (CNFS) were searched for sources of grey literature.
- 31 articles were chosen based on the relevancy of the titles. The abstract of each article was reviewed and 18 articles were chosen to be further analysed. The five key articles used during the study were peer-reviewed. One article was a literature review written by the CNFS. Of the remaining 13 articles, five were grey literature and the remaining was deemed inadequate or irrelevant.

Results

- The literature reviewed shows that there is a language barrier when it comes to French minorities and the health care system. According to the *Francophone minority community consultation*, the delivery of health services and the availabilities of services in French in rural communities are not currently being met (Health Canada, 2011). Furthermore, a concept map of French Ontario residents showed that the population believes that there is a lack of services in French, lack of access to the services, lack of health education offered in French and other problems affecting French minorities (Bouchard, 2011).
- Similar findings have been expressed by the CNFS in the *Consultation of French-Speaking Minority Communities: 2013-2018* report. The CNFS established that major challenges are: a lack of clinical training settings, a reduced number of students, a need for French professors and difficulty with initiating training in underserved areas (Health Canada, 2011).
- Although the CNFS continues to offer healthcare-related post-secondary programs in French there is still an important shortage of dietitians practicing in Canada. In fact, according to an article published in 2012 by Dietitian of Canada only 27% of Canadians have accessed a dietitian and it is expected that 50% of the current dietitian work force will retire in the next 10 years (Wyatt & Dietrich, 2012).
- Francophone health care professionals also face challenges that reduce overall patients quality of care. Some of these challenges are time spent translating files, difficulty in implementing an interdisciplinary approach where all members are able to offer French services and lack of specialist (Drolet et al., 2014). Language discordance has also increased misunderstanding during the communication process (Timony & Gauthier, 2001).

Table 1: The number of studies discussing the recurring topics in the literature.

Recurring topics in the literature reviewed (n=5)	Number of studies
Insufficient access to French health services	5
Lack of bilingual health professionals	5
Challenges faced by health professionals	3
Effect of the language barrier on care the elderly	5

Discussion

- The purpose of this study was to review the current literature in order to determine if the language barrier of French minorities in Canada impacts the quality of healthcare, specifically dietetic services. Findings from this study demonstrate how language barriers negatively impacts many aspects of health care provided minorities such as, access to services, comprehension of diagnosis and informed consent (Official Language Community Development Bureau, 2009).
- The populations most affected by the language barrier according to the literature were the elderly (Bouchard, 2011). Likewise, the study demonstrated some evidence that there are inadequate dietetic services offered to Canadians. Based on the knowledge that there is a lack of health services offered in French, it is expected that dietetic services directed at the French minority are also inadequate.

Conclusions

The results of this study are relevant to the field of dietetic because supporting French minorities require understanding the challenges they face. The literature review has increased the knowledge regarding factors that contribute to the language barrier of French minorities. The study has also provided information on the perceived needs of the French population in terms of health care services. The language barrier faced by French minorities in the health care system has been well established in the literature, yet further research is necessary to determine the impact of the language barrier on access to dietetic services.

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