

What Gets the Word Out: Evaluating the Use of Social Media by COPE Community Health Workers – A Qualitative Study



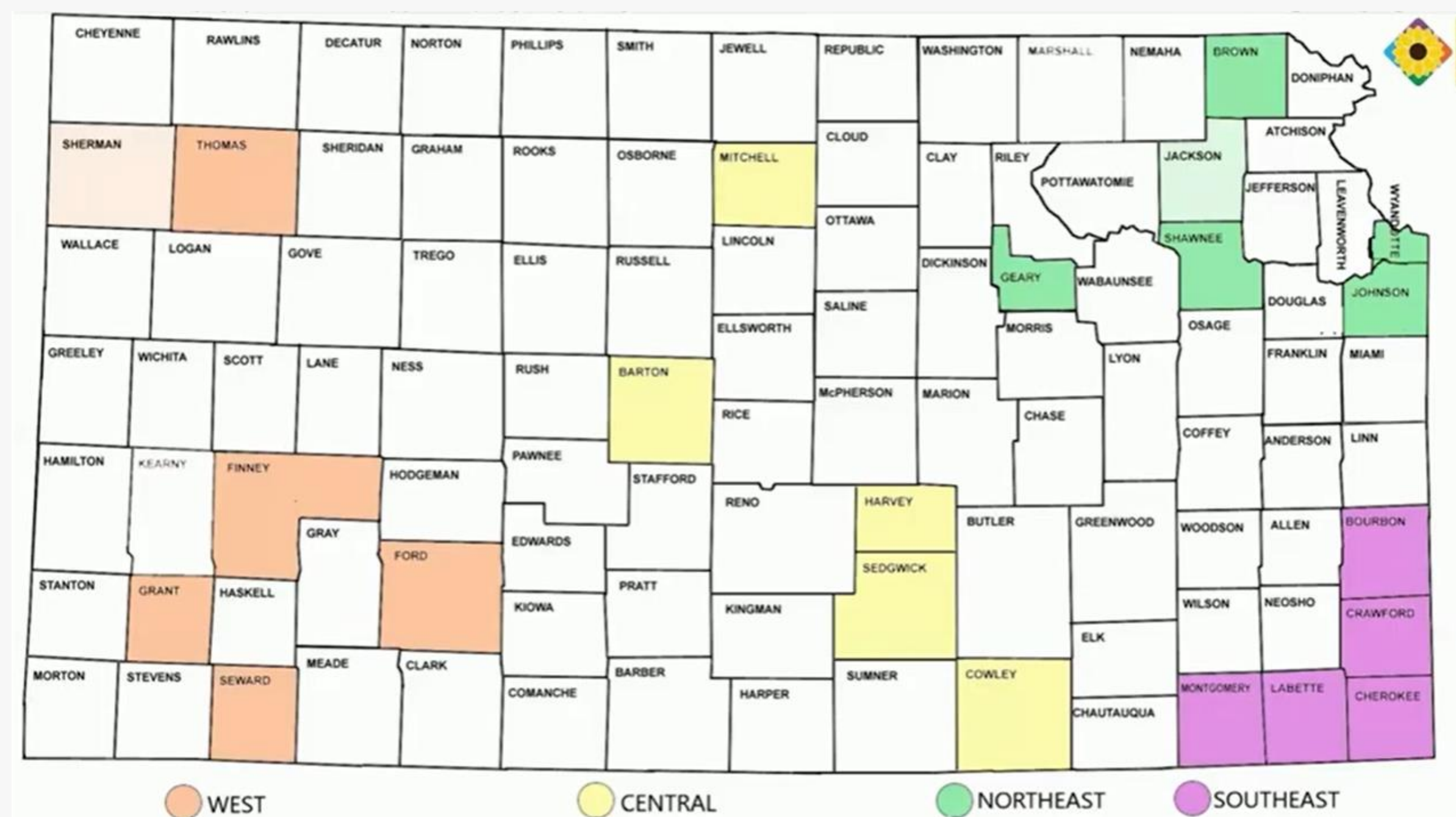
Simon Longhi JD M3, Edward Ellerbeck MD MPH, Elizabeth Ablah PhD MPH, Yvonne Chen PhD, Kristina Bridges PhD, Oluoma Obi, Allison Honn MBA, Emily Morrow PhD, Christina Pacheco JD MPH, Sarah Kessler PhD MPH

University of Kansas School of Medicine



Introduction

- To address health inequities exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, Communities Organizing to Promote Equity (COPE), an academic-community partnership, was established in early 2021.
- The novelty of COPE was to create Local Health Equity Action Teams (LHEATs) across 20 Kansas counties. Comprised of community stakeholders and community health workers (CHWs), LHEATs worked to implement strategies aimed to address underlying social determinants of health.



Purpose

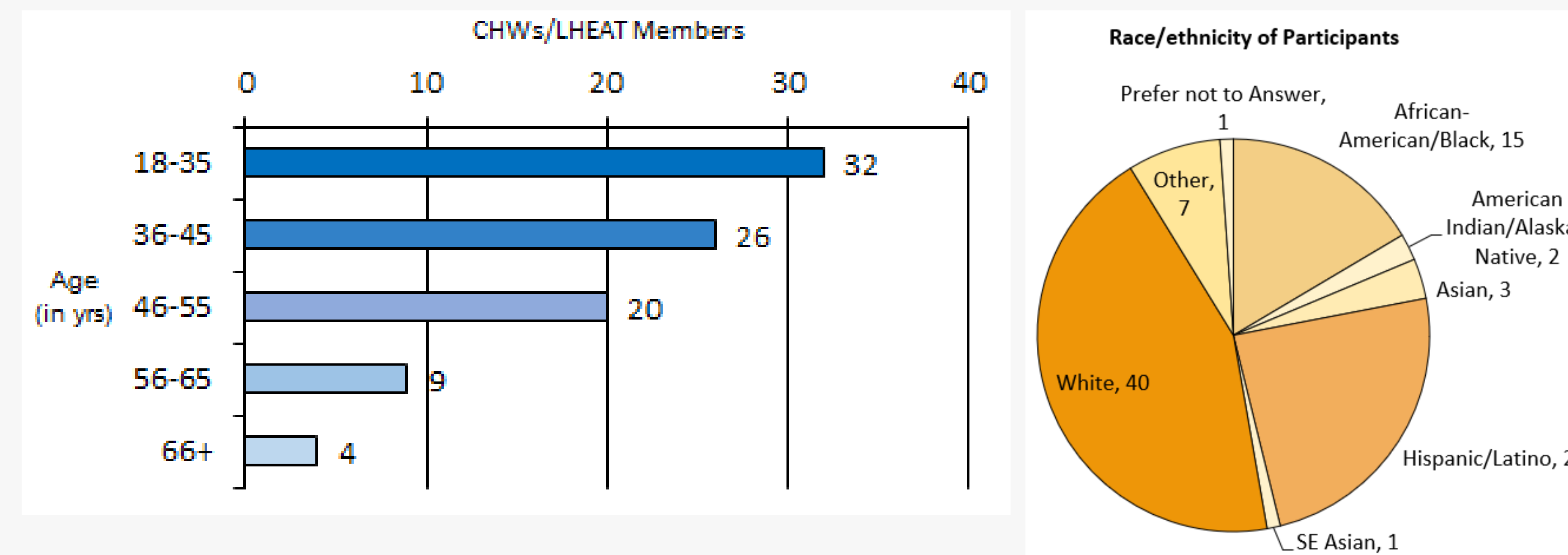
- This study sought to determine the extent that CHWs and LHEAT members use social media to communicate about activities within their networks, eliciting their own impressions and pertinent experiences with social media as a possible means to bolster outreach work.

Methods

- Semi-structured qualitative interviews (n=91) were conducted to assess participants' perceptions of the COPE initiative, including reflection on their preferred outreach strategies and information dissemination to the community about COPE.
- Interviews were conducted via Zoom, recorded, and transcribed.
- Data were then analyzed using grounded theory.

Results

- In total, 40 CHWs and 51 LHEAT members participated.



- Over 80% of participants identified as female.
- Most participants reported using social media to disseminate messages in their communities, with Facebook clearly being the most commonly used strategy.

Attitudes towards Social Media

Positive	Neutral	Averse
Recognition/leveraging of wide outreach potential that goes beyond individual efforts	Preference for more traditional communications – social media an add-on	Caution about over-sharing and being too "open"
Enhanced reach towards the Spanish-speaking population (esp. radio)	Open to considering social media use but lacking knowledge/tools to implement well	Social media is for sharing pictures etc with friends and family, it's not for work
Certain outreach sub-project measurables depended on social media implementation	Social media has utility but is not always appropriate, really depends on the client	I don't do social media; I don't have social media
I do use previous personal connections via social media to amplify COPE work	Great way to announce what we're doing to the community, but not everyone is ready	My own personal network isn't the population we're trying to reach
Social media as a valuable means of connecting professionally between CHWs		
It's very easy to just post it		
However we can get the word out		

- Email and radio were next-most common in use, with WhatsApp, Snapchat, and Textcaster mentioned less so.
- Respondents generally used organizational accounts to distribute messages, but some reported using their personal social media accounts as well.
- Some participants mentioned text-messaging friends and family about events w/expectation that wider dissemination would follow – a word-of-mouth phenomenon.
- More traditional outreach strategies (e.g. flyers, church bulletins) and face-to-face opportunities were also discussed to engage audiences.

- The most striking, instructive responses exhibit a narrative dynamic of a CHW initially approaching social media with skepticism, but then eventually realizing its power and practicality; e.g. :

I am not the biggest technology person ever. Because there weren't even computers in school when I graduated, so I'm like, "Okay, I can't do this." But they'll share something. And they'll say, "Hey X, I put it on Facebook. So you can go out there and, you know, you can share it too." So we use Facebook a lot to reach different people in different organizations.

Discussion

- As COVID-19 circumstances imparted substantial social isolation, the Kansas-specific, largely-rural context of this study provides some insight into how adept social media use can respond efficiently to public health issues.
- This study largely corroborates the observations of existing literature in illuminating persisting generational discrepancies among CHWs in using social media; e.g., past work highlights efforts in which CHWs were given pre-training in work-related social media use, and some respondents in this study could benefit from such an effort.

Conclusions

- In the context of COPE, most CHWs and LHEAT members do report variable but significant use of social media to communicate about outreach activities.
- Data from this study may serve to inform possible training options/topics for CHW implementation.
- This study glimpsed at a few exemplar cases of good use of social media, but future studies more deeply investigating such an individual case would provide further key insight.

Acknowledgments: Special thanks to the various COPE team members who helped facilitate the interview process and provided feedback as the project developed, including Ithar Hassaballa, Ton Miras Neira, Kevin Sykes, Ian Knight, Nadine Long, Clarissa Carrillo Martinez, Mariana Ramirez, and Megan Diniz.

Funding was provided through CDC RFA-OT21-2103: National Initiative to Address COVID-19 Health Disparities Among Populations at High-Risk and Underserved, Including Racial and Ethnic Minority Populations and Rural Communities award.