
The Main Causes of Childhood Obesity

Childhood obesity is a condition characterized by presence of excess fat in the body of a child aged above two years (Birch, et al, 2011). There is no definite and direct way of determining if one has excess fat in their body, conversely, the Body Mass Index (BMI), is used to determine whether one is obese or not. BMI is based on the notion that a healthy body should have a specific ratio of weight to height, a higher ratio would indicate a higher amount of body fat and weight loss undertakings are highly encouraged (Dawes, 2014). Due to increase in the rate of childhood obesity, it has become a matter of public health and there is a greater need to sensitize parents on the precautionary steps to be taken.

This paper will focus on the main reasons for childhood obesity. It will analyze the steps taken to mitigate childhood obesity and the challenges encountered by the society and the obese children. The solutions to these challenges will be tabled and recommendations made on the same.

Issue/Problem Statement

Childhood obesity was not a matter of public health some twenty years ago, however, due to increase in obesogenic environment it has become a national childhood disaster (Dawes, 2014). This environment is characterized by poor eating habits and less physical activities; basically these are factors that can be controlled once realized. Changes in lifestyle has led to change in eating habits for both parents and children; according to the Center of Disease Control and Prevention, the chances of childhood obesity increases if both parents are obese (Birch, et al, 2011).

Childhood obesity forms a vicious cycle of an unhealthy future population, which can easily hinder development. This is primarily because childhood obesity will lead to adulthood obesity and its associated ailments like respiratory problems, high blood pressure and cardiac diseases and diabetes. The government will focus and invest more on curing the ailing population than on developing curriculums and infrastructure. The population will also not be able to perform enough as all attention will be focused on the ailments, invention, innovation and investment will be hindered. There is a greater opportunity cost for having obese children as the future than not having them.

The main reason for obesity especially in children is the food that is consumed. Let's closely examine the current consumption of food; the population feeds on more industrial meat than

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before. In 2011, United States alone slaughtered 110.9million hogs, 34.1million cattle, 853000 calves and 2.2million sheep for consumption (Lymbery & Oakshott, 2015). Consumption of the products from factory farming is harmful to human health. Due to the increase use of antibiotics and growth hormones during incubation and rearing of the animals, the products contain the residues (Casuto, 2007). The effects are consequently passed on to human beings, explaining the exceedingly high rate at which teenagers are maturing and increased in obesity. Consumption of the products also leads to drug resistance in both the animals and human beings, consequently increasing the population ailing from lifestyle diseases.

There is also overconsumption of junk and canned food that have processed fat and other preservative that are easily absorbed into the body and quickly form fat to be stored by the body (Dawes, 2014). Excess body fat makes it hard for the children to be engaged in physical activities as they get tired easily, obese children in this case, do not get to enjoy the perks that come with being a child.

Thesis; Childhood obesity can be prevented by eating a balanced diet and practicing a healthy lifestyle.

Audience analysis

The most crucial target audience for the message in this paper is the parents and guardians. The parents do not have a vast knowledge on proper nutrition but they have channels through which, they can be able to learn and comprehend the concept. According to Casuto, 2007, 65% of obese children are from either single parents home, African American homes or Latin American homes. This is especially so because the parents in the aforementioned bracket live in poor neighborhoods, are constantly away working and cannot provide at times the necessary nutrition for the children. Most of the parents are of the idea of reducing childhood obesity, conversely with the increase in crime rates, they feel security comes first. They have the belief that once children are left to run around outside, they will find themselves caught up in gang shootings. The parent's attitude is positive but their actions are counterproductive to the cause, needless to say, they are still looking out for their children.

Parents are open to the idea of increasing the playtime for children under the condition that security is beefed up (Koplan et al 2005). In this case, they will not feel the need to worry about their children while they are at work. Most of the parents are usually at home during the night and late night television advertisements would be the perfect way to reach them. Alternatively, pamphlets sent via mail can be used to make them aware of the steps that they can be able to take in order to ensure that their children do not become obese.

The secondary target audience is the children; they require to be taught the importance of a

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proper nutrition is far greater than the instant gratification they get from consumption of junk and processed foods (Koplan et al 2005). The number of obese children has more than doubled in the last 30 years, in 1979 only 7% of the children were obese in 2011, the number had risen to 18%. Currently one in every three children is obese. This is a third of the entire child population in America aged between 6-11 years (Koplan et al 2005).

Finally the unintended target audience is the schools. Currently there are 98,817 public schools in America, children spend eight or more hours a day in school and here is where much of learning on personal, academic and social life takes place. The schools have a vast knowledge on proper child nutrition and can utilize in ensuring that there is a daily balance diet for all students.

Strategies for Persuasive Campaigns

I. Theories of Persuasion

Attribution Theory: Conditional Attribution

Conditioning plays a vital role in persuading a crowd especially when it is a matter of changing the type of lifestyle. It requires a mentorship role followed by voluntary actions by the mentee. Conditioning is more a mental and emotional game for instance creating an impression about a product and convincing people about its benefits. In this case, children can be mentored by people they adore for instance their favorite celebrity, parents or even sport player. They can be urged to practice a healthy lifestyle and conditioned to it. Pavlov's conclusions on conditioning will be applicable as after a while even without parental guidance and supervision the children will have adopted to the new lifestyle and it will become their daily routine.

Conditioning at the same time has to be done severally to ensure that it is not forgotten. This means that it is a conditioning will be a continuous process that will be associated with better health and what will be termed as beauty at the moment of conditioning.

Cognitive Dissonance Theory

Cognitive dissonance is based on the premise that as human beings, we strive to have consistency. What is termed as wrong by the mind, one's actions and body should restrain from it, consequently forming a brain-body harmony. The children can be taught that consumption of fatty and processed food is perilous to their body, they should be taught the importance of the physical exercise. Once they have been taught that, the actions will follow suit as their minds will seek to harmonize thoughts and actions.

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Achieving harmony of mind and action is the hard part, once established; it is followed by need for consistency in life. The parents and schools should strive to ensure that they offer a consistent environment that does not seek to have the children routine changed haphazardly. Cognitive dissonance also fosters competition to outdo each other and be better. This is a spirit that comes in handy in sporting activities and can increase the level of talent to be discovered in the children and consequently get them out of their houses to participate in outdoor activities.

II. Psychosocial Perspective

Socio Economic Status

Research has found out that lower level of education of the parents leads to a lower income. The parents cannot afford proper nutrition for the children; additionally the parents are always working and spending more time away from the homes. The children are left to determine what they should eat and they always turn to junk food and processed meat. According to the World Health Organization, (2013) most of the cases of obese children are found in families that are believed to be in transition. Transitions are changes in the lifestyle that are mostly as a product of lack of a stable income by the parents. This is especially the case in single parent homes that have been on the rise due to the falling role of marriage as a social institution (Parizkova & Hills, 2005).

Adverse life events

Obesity may be a coping mechanism for the children who might be undergoing adverse life events. These events include but are not limited to death of a family member or friend, domestic violence, sexual abuse, lack of a social network and parental psychopathology (Koplan et al 2005). All these can be dealt with by undergoing proper counseling over a period of time and have stable social support system, however due to lack of time and resources; the child is left to his own demise.

Exposure to Media and Food advertisements

Currently in America, on average a child watches television for more than 3 hours a day, which more than the recommended 2 hours a day (Parizkova & Hills, 2005). Watching television has taken up time that was previously used in physical activities by the children. Also, while watching television one consumes more food that they are aware of and energy is stored up as no activity is engaged. Advertisements on media on consumption of unhealthy foods have increased and this makes teenagers and children to seek to have these foods.

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III. Strategic Application

Childhood obesity is a public health problem but it is not being taken with the level of seriousness and soberness it deserves. This is because it is viewed as a lifestyle disease that is acquired by choice and can easily be avoided (Parizkova & Hills, 2005). Truth of the matter is that it is a lifestyle disease that requires serious measure to be taken by all parties involved in the lives of the children including the media. Children are the next generation and require to be nurtured, lack of proper nutrition will not end with them, but will serve as a beginning to unending health related issues.

Persuasion Material

The best persuasion material to be used is an advertisement with pictures to emphasize of the visual effects. There will be a photo of an obese child and one that is not obese followed by what to be eaten by children in order to avoid getting obese. The visual effect will ensure that the children get to understand the type of food to avoid and the ones to indulge in.

Challenges in Dealing with Childhood Obesity

The most crucial challenge to dealing with childhood obesity is that the necessary actions to be taken are beyond the capabilities of the children themselves. Merely educating the child on the importance of healthy nutrition will not suffice if the parents are not able to afford or don't wish to be involved in the process. The children therefore are left at the mercy of the choices made by their guardians and the prevailing economic condition that they cannot impact.

The other challenge is the current public health and public school regime that has not yet grasped the seriousness of the condition. There is need to have concrete plans on how to aid the children and to get them involved in the maintenance of their own health (Parizkova & Hills, 2005). This can be incorporated by having a well-structured counseling platform to deal with psychological issues affecting the children (Birch, et al, 2011). There should also be sessions where children are taught on the combination of a balanced diet and its importance. The lunch menu should always incorporate less fats and more roughage and food rich in high fiber.

Solutions to Childhood Obesity

The first and most important solution is to teach newly parents on how to properly feed their children from the onset. Junk food should be avoided at all costs, the parents should strive to have a balanced and healthy diet and the children will follow in their footsteps (Voigt, et al 2014). The requirements for the children should be clearly stated and the consequences of poor

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eating habits be clearly stated. Secondly, children should be encouraged to get involved in sports from the youngest age so that it can be cultivated as a culture (Dawes, 2014). This recreational activity will allow for the children to redirect negative energy that might make them to be depressed and overindulge in junk food.

Schools should be involved in creating awareness and partner with organizations that strictly deal with childhood obesity. A decent illustration is SPARK an award winning public health program that is involved in educating teachers and other educators with proper physical activities to be embarked on by the children in an effort to combat childhood obesity. Teachers receive physical activities that are necessary and how they can be made fun for the children to capture their attention.

The state and local governments in conjunction with the parents can be able to offer well equipped and staffed gymnasiums to the schools to be able to fully capture the interests of the children. In this light, schools can offer various sports varying from ball games, athletics, ballet dancing and gymnastics. Technology in this case can be used to pull the children from the comfort of their couches to the field (Parizkova & Hills, 2005).

The government should limit and control the number of advertisement on unhealthy foods and unhealthy weight loss mechanisms. This will reduce the impact that the two have on children and decrease the number of children that experience obesity due to influence from the media (Parizkova & Hills, 2005).

Measurement and Conclusion

Once the above challenges have been mitigated by using the aforementioned solutions, there will be a need to measure the success of the project. Measurement can be conducted in several ways;

- Analyzing the schools and the physical health programs offered. The success of these programs should be measured by the number of students that have signed up and stick to it to the end. The programs should have records of the students in terms of their BMI while they were joining the program and the progress that has been witnessed. The program should have methods of dealing with challenges that it may face. The more the students and the more there is an improved trend in the BMI and physical activity the more the program will be termed as successful. The reverse is also true.

- The number of advertisements on unhealthy foods and unhealthy weight loss processes should have reduced especially in channels meant for children (Voigt, et al 2014). This is a measurement that the government has imposed control on the level of influence of

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media on children.

- An increase in the number of children involved in sports in schools will be an indication of increased need to stay healthy. This would be followed by an increase in the number of sports available for the children to participate in (Voigt, et al 2014). A change in the menu of food offered in school cafeteria to more healthy and nutritious food. This is a clear indication that the solutions are being implemented in schools.
- Increase in parental participation in their children's food intake, consequently the demand for junk food should decrease. This should also include home deliveries for Pizza and other foods. Home prepared meals are more nutritious for children.

In conclusion, child obesity was a foreseen event especially when the lifestyle and food intake pattern changed; conversely its increased prevalence over the last ten years was not foreseen. Currently it is one of the main ailments to be dealt with in children especially in industrialized countries. Obesity is a consequence of certain actions, meaning it can be reversed, conversely the process is time consuming and expensive.

It is because it requires a change from the current lifestyle to the previous one; one that had less fatty foods and more physical activities. The challenge is that times have changed and with the improved technology it is becoming more and more difficult to take people to a previous lifestyle. Most choose to take on surgeries that are quite risky and expensive in order to combat the challenges that come with obesity.

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