

Aspects of Health Education.

1000-1500 words

1. Choose a specific health aspect.
2. Demonstrate an understanding that it relates to young children's learning and
3. the impact of poverty and inequality.
4. Speak of my role and that of other professionals and agencies related to this issue.
5. Explore social/cultural diversity.
6. Explore ethical issues.
7. Demonstrate scientific/technological impact on the modern day

Introduction What is obesity? And why is it on the rise?

This essay will identify and discuss the specific health issue of obesity in young children, how it affects young children's learning and how various professionals and agencies are tackling this issue in the modern day. It will also include how poverty and inequality can have a significant impact on this health issue.

Main Body.

What is it??

The Oxford English Dictionary describes obesity as:

Obese /'bis/ a. very fat. Obesity (p301 oxford mini dictionary)

Where as the NHS defines it as

'... excess body fat for a given height and gender'
(<http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk/nhsdoheo/print.asp?sTopic=Obesity&sPrintAll=true>).

Although it appears that there is not any one definitive definition for obesity, obesity in young children is steadily on the increase especially it seems within young children. Research recently carried out by the **National Audit Office** reported that

'Obesity levels in England have almost tripled in the last 20 years. Nearly two thirds of men and more than half of women are overweight or obese and it is an increasing problem among children.' <http://www.hda-online.org.uk/hdt/1101/evidence.htm>

In past decades a child which was 'plump' or 'chubby' would be considered a healthy strong child which would be able to withstand infections and such. However it now appears that children who are overweight are becoming a major cause for concern amongst the health care profession, especially within early childhood. The British Medical Journal revealed that 'More than one in five of Britain's under fours are overweight and one in 10 are classed as clinically obese.'

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/low/health/1160220.stm> Confirming that children are fatter than a decade before.

There are many factors and causes as to why obesity is on the increase. One of the main reasons may be due to the social economic structures and changes within the family, such as parents working therefore having less time to prepare food, a greater access to fast food outlets, and the advertising and marketing of foods, some directly designed to appeal to young children.

With a greater increase of computer games, the Internet and television, children are now it appears less active than ever. **QUOTE** One factor worth considering is that parents now have greater fears for their children's safety and where previously children would have walked to school they now are taken by car.

How does it affect children???

There are many health risks involved when children are overweight or obese, and these are not just physical risks and many have potentially devastating consequences. In children, as in adults, carrying around many extra stones of weight can cause hypertension (high blood pressure), and increases the risk of causing the blood to clot. It has also been linked to difficulties in breathing during sleep, asthma and serious liver and kidney conditions. The chair of the obesity foundation goes further to state: **IS IT THAT PERSON?**

'Obesity is associated with **numerous health complications** which range from non-fatal debilitating conditions such as **osteoarthritis**, to life threatening chronic diseases such as **Coronary Heart Disease, diabetes, and certain cancers**'

<http://www.obesity.chair.ulaval.ca/IOTF.htm>

However, when looking at the effects of being over weight within young children, apart from the physical aspects there are also the psychological effects, which can range from depression, poor self-image that may then lead to eating disorders that can continue into adulthood. **Overweight children as young as age 5 years can develop a negative self-image, and obese adolescents show declining degrees of self-esteem associated with sadness, loneliness, nervousness, and high-risk behaviour's.**

<http://www.thelancet.com/search/search.isa>

The impact poverty/inequality has??

Significantly, a leading factor related to obesity is poverty and that many children are unable to eat a sufficient well-rounded diet. Interestingly, the Rowntree Foundation (2002)? **Found that 'One in fifty children did not have daily fresh fruit or vegetables'**.

Martin Barnes, director of the Child Poverty Action Group, said: ... **'many families in Britain cannot afford to eat enough or eat well.'**

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/low/uk/1707636.stm>

Suggesting that children may not be getting a healthy varied and well -rounded diet due to it not being affordable or accessible for many households.

' Children growing up in disadvantaged families are about 50% less likely to eat fruit and vegetables than those in high-income families. The social class gap is greatest for fruit consumption' <http://www.doh.gov.uk/schoolfruitscheme/equalstart.htm>

A survey carried out by the **Local Authority Caterers Association (1999)** found that 60% of parents said that the school meal played a vital role in their child's diet. However with cut backs and subcontracting school meals may still not be setting a good example for healthy eating.

What effect technology has

The effect of television viewing on obesity risk is of particular interest. Television viewing is thought to promote weight gain. Furthermore, television advertising could adversely affect the dietary patterns of children throughout the day. Research by the National Food Alliance (Sustain) found that on analysing television content children were exposed to higher quantities of advertising particularly of food content than adults were. <http://www.pdf.co-operative.co.uk/pdfs/blackmailsignoff.pdf>

Unfortunately, although not surprisingly, many of these foods were found to be of high fat and high calorie content.

As the report states

' Fatty and sugary foods, the food groups which children should eat least, are advertised during children's programming in proportions many times higher than that recommended in dietary guidelines'

<http://www.cpag.org.uk/info/Povertyarticles/Poverty109/adverts.htm>

It appears that advertising has a direct impact on the diets that children now eat and for families on low incomes this can become an added pressure if children are frequently requesting branded food that has been advertised relentlessly on the television.

Governments approach incentives

The concern in this area of children's health is no doubt rising, so much so that the current government is now playing an integral part in raising the awareness and importance of fresh fruit and vegetables along with exercise in young children's lives by introducing the School Fruit Scheme. The department of Health states that the:

' Consumption of fruit and vegetables by children seems to have fallen over the last twenty years. For too many families, access to healthy food is limited, especially in some low-income areas where affordable fruit and vegetables can be hard to find. These inequalities are reflected in health, as people on low income are three times more likely to die early from coronary heart disease than those from professional backgrounds

<http://www.doh.gov.uk/schoolfruitscheme/minister.htm>

The aim of the School Fruit Scheme entitles children up to six years of age to free fruit each day. The government believes that this alongside new nutritional standards for school meals, and in conjunction with community projects to improve access to healthy food, will be a vital step forwards towards improving all children's health and tackling health inequalities across the country in a variety of ways for example with breakfast clubs, after school clubs and the introduction of more Sure Start projects

where all health organisations and facilities can be accessed all under the one roof, educating children , parents and the wider community as a whole.

Agency involvement

It appears that stronger links need to be forged between professional agencies parents and the wider communities in a bid to tackle the inequalities within young children. Practitioners within the class environment can do this by encouraging children and parents to participate in healthy cooking activities for example making fruit salad or other cultural dishes. This could be ongoing with activities and stories based around healthy eating and a healthy life style, for example with the story of The Hungry Caterpillar, discussing healthy food, looking after teeth etc. It would also be highly beneficial to encourage awareness in adults, parents and children alike by having information, books and literature regarding certain important health issues readily available in a wide variety of languages so that the information reaches the whole community regardless ethnicity. Indeed the Government's commitment to opening the Sure Start Programme in areas of disadvantage appear to be a step in the right direction in combating the equalities within children's health.

Conclusion

This essay has identified how obesity is on the increase in the UK and the effects this can have upon young children. It is fair to say that many factors appear to contribute to this problem from advertising to current lifestyles and that inequality; particularly poverty has a significant bearing. Hopefully with the new government schemes like The School Fruit Scheme and Sure Start along with schools and other agencies informing parents about the benefits of healthy eating and exercise these inequalities will start to eliminate and the health of children will improve.