**Global Health Issue Policy Brief**

**Introduction**

Obesity has become a critical public health issue that has registered global significance. Particularly, scholars have defined obesity as a global problem that has numerous adverse effects. Many scholars believe that obesity has attracted global significance because it threatens a great percentage of the population and has numerous associated diseases. There is evidence that obesity registers both economic and social impacts and affects the young and the old. Many countries in the developed world have declared obesity as a national epidemic. For this reason, there is a need to develop effective prevention strategies with the core objective of saving the future generation. Many countries are spending a remarkable percentage of the funds allocated to the healthcare sector in the management of obesity-related complications. It is explicit that different governments need to adopt measures of preventing and reducing the adverse effects of obesity.

**Magnitude of the Problem**

According to the World Health Organization statistics (WHO), the prevalence of obesity has doubled globally since 1980. In 2014, an approximated number of 1.9 billion adults fell under the category of being overweight. An alarming number of more than 600 million people were obese. In many countries, more people die because of being overweight and obese compared to people who die because they are underweight. Researchers categorized more than 41 million children below five years as obese or overweight in 2014 (Kar & Khandelwal, 2015). Undoubtedly, the number has increased significantly in the last two years. In Africa, overweight and obesity cases have also doubled since 1990. There were only 10.6 million people categorized as overweight or obese in Africa in 2014.

The World Health Organization statistics further indicated that the highest number of children affected by obesity live in Asia. The developed world also registers alarming rates of obesity. In the United States of America, there is an increasing rate of obesity prevalence among children and young. Particularly, childhood obesity has tripled between 1980 and 2016. Currently, about 8.9% of children between 2-5 years of age are either obese or overweight (Hruby et al., 2016). Similarly, obesity among teenagers has also increased alarmingly. In Europe, obesity remains a major health problem despite the measures taken to promote healthy living. One out of every six people in Europe is either obese or overweight.

**Populations Affected by Obesity**

As highlighted above, obesity affects children, young people, and adults. Specifically, children and adolescents are becoming highly vulnerable to developing obesity due to the increasing availability of fast foods and the adopting of a sedentary lifestyle. Adults living in urban areas are more susceptible to developing obesity because of their sedentary lifestyle and dietary choices. The elderly are also affected by obesity, which triggers other chronic diseases. For this reason, every individual is susceptible to developing obesity unless there are efforts of maintaining a healthy lifestyle (Muckenhuber et al., 2015). In the developed world, adults living in urban areas, as well as children and adolescents, are most affected by obesity. Experts have classified African-Americans and other minority groups living in the United States as more vulnerable to developing obesity.

**Obesity Risk Factors**

Leading a sedentary lifestyle is one of the risk factors of obesity. Particularly, a sedentary lifestyle involves minimal or no physical activity. For this reason, individuals with such a lifestyle spend many hours sitting in the workplace or the school setting. As a result, the consumer more calories than their bodies need for the normal daily functioning. The working class and students are likely to develop a sedentary lifestyle that exposes them to developing obesity. The consumption of an unhealthy diet is also a major risk factor that leads to the development of obesity (Birbilis et al., 2013). The increasing popularity and preference of fast foods, soft drinks, and highly processed food products is a major contributor to obesity. Many of such food products have no nutritional values, but are full of empty calories that promote weight gain.

Genetic factors also pose a risk for the development of obesity. Particularly, a person’s genetic makeup determines the metabolic rate as well as the fat distribution rate in the body. Some individuals have a high metabolic rate that is predetermined by their genes. However, other people have a slow metabolic rate, and their bodies tend to store more fat, a factor that eventually leads to obesity. Experts have also characterized the family as a potential risk factor for the development of obesity (Knol et al., 2016). Specifically, family members share the same food and develop similar lifestyles. As a result, the risk of being obese increases when one grows up in a family that grows fast foods and is less active.

Parents who make unhealthy food choices contribute significantly to the rate of obesity among children and adolescents. Socioeconomic factors may also contribute to the development of obesity. For instance, individuals living in certain neighborhoods are unable to exercise because of security-related reasons. Additionally, some people lack adequate finances to afford fresh foods or vegetables or to purchase natural foods. In some neighborhoods, it is difficult to access natural and organic foods that are healthy for consumption (Story, Kaphingst, & French, 2006). Notably, it is possible to counteract many of the risk factors described above by adopting a healthy diet, regular physical activity, and registering behavioral changes.

**Economic and Social Consequences**

The increasing rates of obesity have led to an economic burden experienced by different nations. The management of obesity and the treatment of obesity-related diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular diseases are extremely expensive. Many life-threatening chronic diseases relate to obesity, and they strain the economy of nations and leave the healthcare sector struggling to ensure that all the affected individuals have access to basic healthcare services (Muckenhuber et al., 2015). There are social consequences of obesity, such as discrimination, experiencing a lower quality of life, and lower wages. Obesity affects a person’s appearance and lowers self-esteem. As a result, affected individuals are less likely to engage in social interactions. Body shaming has become a common social problem that affects individuals with obesity because they are victims of body shaming.

**Priority Action Steps**

Specific nursing action should include:

1. Establishing community programs that focus on the primary prevention of obesity
2. Establishing programs for managing obesity and overweight cases

Specific governmental actions will include:

1. Increasing funding to support public education programs and media campaigns that emphasize the need for healthy eating and physical exercise
2. Regulating food companies to ensure that they adopt proper labeling of healthy foods and reduce the advertising of fast foods

**References**

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