**Childhood Obesity in Hispanic Children and Teen Pregnancy**

**Population Defined**

More than 17.5 million Hispanics, according to the 2016 records, are teenagers and children aged 18 years and below. Compared to the 2007 records, the population of the Hispanic children grew by about 4% over a period of nine years (Ness, Barradas, Irving & Manning, 2012). The rapid growth in the Hispanic population can be attributed to high fertility rates among the Latino women as well as past immigration of Latin Americans into the United States. Hispanic children have been ranked among the fastest growing population in the United States. They are also the largest minority group in public schools and are posting significant graduation rates in high schools. However, their academic achievements, according to the GPA scores, still rank below the whites as well as black children (Kimbro, Brooks-Gunn & McLanahan, 2007). The poverty index is also high among the Hispanic children than the white children. For instance, most Hispanic children live in families with an average annual income of $47,675 which is far below $65,041 representing white families.

**Population Described**

Based on the current growth rate, Hispanic children are likely to make about 35% of the population of the United States’ children by 2050. More than 90% of the Hispanic children were born in the United States and have family connections to countries such as Mexico, Cuba, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Cuba, and Puerto Rico (Kimbro, Brooks-Gunn & McLanahan, 2007). According to the Washington Post, about 58% of the Hispanic children live with two married parents. Only 40% may be living with single parents or members of extended families such as grandmothers and grandfathers. According to Schneiderman, Arnold-Clark, Duan & Palinkas (2013), grandparents have high influence on the behaviors of the Hispanic children because the Hispanic culture holds them in high esteem (Ness, Barradas, Irving & Manning, 2012). Hispanic children are more likely to eat at home with their families that whites or black children. About 62% of the Hispanic children live in families with income that is just enough to cover basic needs (). The detailed analysis indicates that about 33% of the Hispanic children meet the federal definition of poor, compared to 38% and 11% among black and white counterparts respectively.

**Primary Health Issues**

The primary health issues affecting the Hispanic children include childhood obesity and teen pregnancy. The current prevalence rate of obesity among Hispanic children stands at 17.3% (Schneiderman, Arnold-Clark, Duan & Palinkas, 2013). The rate is slightly below the Indian/Alaska Natives which stands at 18.0%. The prevalence rate is also high among black children but significantly low among whites. The prevalence rate is much higher, about 47.7%, among the children between the age of 12 and 18 years. Study conducted on the Hispanic children also indicates that children between the age of 6 and 18 years are at an increased risk of overweight/obesity compared to children aged between 2 and 5 years (Ness, Barradas, Irving & Manning, 2012). Obesity may not be a direct cause of death, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), but it creates conditions leading to heart diseases, diabetes, or cancer. In the United States, heart diseases rank among the highest causes of deaths with an average of 598,000 deaths per year. The high rate of obesity among Hispanic children is a significant risk factor which may cause several deaths.

Apart from childhood obesity, another significant health issue affecting the Hispanics is teen pregnancy. According to Headlee (2018), Hispanic teens hold the highest record of teen pregnancies in the United States. The current rate of teen pregnancies among the Hispanics stands at 25.5% among the Hispanics aged between 15 and 17 years (Headlee, 2018). In comparison, the total birth rate among 1,000 teenagers sampled across all ethnicities in the United States stands at 14.1%. This implies that teen pregnancies among Hispanics is nearly 11% higher than the average rate across all ethnicities in the United States. Teen pregnancies among blacks comes closer at 21.8% while the rate among Native Alaskans comes third at 17.0%. The high prevalence of teen pregnancies is problem because most of the mothers at such a tender age may not provide good care to their children (Ness, Barradas, Irving & Manning, 2012). Besides, many teenagers end up dead during the delivery stage because of various complications at birth. The high rate of teenage pregnancies among Hispanics has also been identified among the sources of poverty in the region.

The major risk factors associated with high prevalence of teen pregnancies among the Hispanics include poor education, high rates of poverty, poor parenting, peer pressure, and teenage drinking or drug abuse (Schneiderman, Arnold-Clark, Duan & Palinkas, 2013). Many Hispanic teenage girls are likely to drop out of schools because they do not have sufficient funds to pursue higher education. Poor education exposes teenage girls to early pregnancies because they do not understand the risks involved (Headlee, 2018). The risk factors associated with the high prevalence of obesity among Hispanic children include low income, little or lack of knowledge, unhealthy eating patterns and insufficient physical exercise.

**Population or Community-wide Prevention Strategies**

The major prevention strategy for childhood obesity is healthy eating and active living. The community should prevent high rates of obesity by adopting healthy organic foods that are rich in nutrients needed by the body for growth and development (Headlee, 2018). Apart from healthy eating, every community should develop play grounds where children can participate in various games such as baseball, basketball, football, or cricket. Any activity that is likely to keep children active should be highly encouraged by community leaders. About teen pregnancies, the prevention strategies include improving the parental care, engaging teenagers in sex education, and monitoring teenage behaviors. Parents can work closely with community organizations to educate their children on the dangers of teenage sex and early pregnancies (Ness, Barradas, Irving & Manning, 2012). Many teenagers may not understand that there are many risks involved in teen pregnancies including the possibility of contracting HIV/AIDS.

**Role of a Doctor of Nursing Practice Clinician in Implementing the Prevention Strategies**

Doctors or nursing professionals may assist towards implementing the above strategies by educating teenagers about the dangers of eating unhealthy foods that are too high in fats or cholesterol. Apart from community education, doctors and nurses should assist communities by assessing various risk factors and advising communities on how to prevent the problems (Latin Post, 2018). For instance, doctors may assist teenage girls by organizing regular sex education to help them understand the dangers of risky sexual behaviors. Moreover, doctors may also assist towards organizing a more professional appeal towards community empowerment through various federal and state-funded projects.

**References**

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