Literature Review: Factors of Obesity in the CNMI

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This draft was written on April 21, 2016 and was prepared in partial fulfillment of the subject course EN202 – 03 English Composition II under Mrs. Kimberly Anderson’s class.

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Factors of Obesity in the CNMI

Underneath the surface of a “tropical island paradise,” the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Island community is enduring an enormous burden of prolonged illnesses. According to the CNMI Department of Public Health (DPH), hefty elements have been inflicted onto them through outside influences and acculturation, in which are continuously constant to be prevented. Like many small island territories, the native populations of the CNMI die young due to their current lifestyle choices because of the influences they are currently undergoing. DPH also points out that, “Levels of obesity… are at historical highs” adjacent to the variety of unanimous diseases that come with it (2008. p13). This literature review will be organized into four different categories of primary influences and lifestyle choices that causes obesity in the CNMI which include poor eating habits, the lack of parental guidance and support, the lack of awareness that ties into cultural influences and beliefs as well as the lack of physical activity in one’s everyday routine.

Poor eating habits and food choice are mentioned frequently as prime factors when it comes to obesity (CNMI DPH, 2008; Senthilingam, 2015; Curtis, p37). In the constant life that we currently live, people in the CNMI go day by day not taking the time to indulge in their meals and tend to speed eat instead. The CNMI DPH elaborated that many are too busy doing other things and choose to eat fast food while others like to skip breakfast, which leads to overeating later during the day or late at night. Canned goods and other unhealthy foods are easily accessible and are way more affordable than purchasing natural or organic ingredients. “A visit to any store” in the CNMI will disclose isles of unhealthy canned goods, such as “Spam, corned beef, Vienna sausages… cake mix,” ice cream, candy bars and potato chips. The document also pointed out that poor diet is essentially associated with obesity, which leads to many other chronic illnesses–(2008).

In addition, an article written by Micheal Curtis, entitled, “*The Obesity Epidemic in the Pacific Islands,”* mentions that, the main reasons of obesity originate from large ingestions of greasy or oily foods as well as foods that are high in sugar and carbohydrates. Curtis states, that the influences of such an endemic is the reliance on the so called “Western Diet,” which substitutes the customary foods of the islands from “fresh fish, meat and local fruits and vegetables” to “rice, sugar, flour, canned fruits and vegetables, soft drinks and beer” (Journal of Development & Social Transformation, p37). Breaking News on CNN elaborated that the “Pacific Islands are home to nine of the top ten countries for obesity globally” (Senthilingam, 2015). The news added that despite the elegance and reservation of the islands, the territories face an additional certainty within their residency, an existence centered on processed food.

Another leading factor that influences obesity amongst others would include the lack of parental guidance and support. According to a study that took place in the CNMI by the Primary Prevention in Childhood Obesity, the author pointed out that in order to counteract obesity, it must initially originate within the residence. Nevertheless, a book entitled, “*Super Sized Kids: How to Rescue Your Child from The Obesity Threat,”* the decisions and choices parents make when it comes to dieting and nutrition can make an overall impact on the health and welfare of their children. The book further explains that increased family involvements with daily health-promoting activities as well as the implementation of good nutrition have everything to do with their children’s weight. It pointed out the essence of “raising children” to become knowledgeable in order to grasp the “power to avoid becoming or remaining Super-sized” (Flynt, Halliday, Larimore, 2005 pXI)

Additionally, an article entitled, *“The Parent’s Role in Childhood Obesity,”* indicates that, “There is abundant evidence supporting the idea that a child’s attitudes towards healthy living habits are significantly related to those of their parents” (Wintrup, 2010). The article further explains that, children first pick up behavioral patterns such as eating habits or making healthy choices by observing their primary caregivers whom are, in most cases, usually their parents. It also points out the importance and benefits of promoting and fostering healthful lifestyles with their kids at a young age in order for them to make better choices as they grow.

Nevertheless, another principal influence on obesity also includes lack of awareness, which is also highly linked to cultural beliefs and influences within the CNMI. Brittany Goodison stated that according to a study, “the CNMI culture is a care giving one, a trait that has been thought to influence the way children are fed and their subsequent weight.” To be exact, the study portrayed confusion between “traditional dietary practices and beliefs, knowledge of disease as it relates to food, expectations of the family, and the values of society at large.” Goodison also points out that customarily, when it comes to the people of the CNMI, there is a correlation between the caring, love and genorosity of food–(2015).

Furthermore, the American Diabetes Association indicated in an article that, “Culture is believed to contribute to disparities in childhood obesity in numerous ways” (Kirkman, 2016). It also indicatedt that, “Culture influences child-feeding practices in terms of beliefs, values, and behaviors related to different foods,” in which ultimately influences the insight of threats correlated with obesity.

However, in addition to Curtis’s statement about the primary causes of obesity, physical inactivity is also one of them. In the fast-paced world that we live in, many people have no time to put in exercise in their daily routine these days. The lack of movement and exercise is what makes overweight people obese. Curtis affirms, that the accumulative practice of contemporary machinery and the move from “agricultural-based” employments to domestic professions has tremendously altered the physical routine of everyday life in society (p37).

Nonetheless, DPH also stated that there was a low rate of physical activity among the children in the CNMI. The document also stated that obesity influenced by “physical inactivity is significantly associated with an increased risk of diabetes…and poor health status” (2008, p19). A book entitled, *Our Overweight Children,* implied that adolescents are more prone to become heavier than usual when there is an absence of continuous physical activity in which they can engage or be promoted in (Dalton, S., 2004). Therefore, obese children, eventually and more than likely grow into obese adults.

There are many other influences and other leading factors that may contribute to obesity in general. However, many of which were mentioned have become the primary aspects of obesity in the CNMI today. It has become a serious issue in the CNMI and has yet to be properly addressed and resolved. These many factors include that of an individual’s lifestyle choices. Some of which would include poor eating habits, the lack of parental guidance and support, the many conflicts between cultural influences and beliefs as well as the lack of physical activity. Frequent intake of fatty and sugary foods, fast food, and physical inactivity leads to obesity, which is linked to many chronic diseases and enduring health problems. The numbers of obese adults and children have increased dramatically around the world. Obesity is the leading factor of mortality in the CNMI and if this pandemic is not prevented and ultimately put to a stop, the CNMI population will cease to exist in the years to come. It is essential to come up with a resolution to tackle such influences in order to preserve the CNMI population and maintain an active and healthy lifestyle for future generations to come. Otherwise, the shores of tiny islands in the Pacific will continue to become one of the highest ranked places of obesity in the world.

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