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## Role of parental support in reducing childhood obesity through physical education in India in the contemporary Era

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### Abstract

Childhood obesity is a growing concern in India, necessitating effective strategies for prevention and intervention. This research paper explores the critical role of parental support in reducing childhood obesity through physical education programs. It examines the unique socio-cultural context of India and provides insights into the ways parents can contribute to and enhance the effectiveness of physical education interventions. The paper emphasizes the importance of collaborative efforts between schools, parents, and communities to address this pressing public health issue.

**Keywords:** Childhood obesity, parental support, physical education, contemporary era

### Introduction

Childhood obesity represents a pressing global health concern with far-reaching consequences for individuals, communities, and healthcare systems. Its emergence in India, a nation steeped in rich cultural traditions and undergoing rapid societal changes, poses unique challenges and opportunities. In the contemporary era, as India grapples with modernization and its associated shifts in dietary patterns, sedentary lifestyles, and health behaviors, the need to address childhood obesity becomes increasingly urgent.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has sounded the alarm, characterizing childhood obesity as one of the most serious public health challenges of the 21st century. This assertion is particularly salient in India, where demographic shifts, urbanization, and changing family dynamics are influencing the health trajectories of its youngest generation. As childhood obesity continues to rise, its repercussions on long-term health and well-being are magnified, manifesting as a significant burden on healthcare systems and a threat to the quality of life for millions of children.

The children of mothers who suffer from diabetes mellitus, gestational diabetes, and under nutrition and over nutrition during pregnancy are at particular risk for obesity, with the greatest risk factor being gestational diabetes.

Parents also have an important role to play during infancy, when a child is establishing the foundation for dietary habits and nutritional adequacy over a lifetime.

Physical education (PE) programs within Indian schools have been recognized as a cornerstone in the battle against childhood obesity. These programs, when thoughtfully designed and implemented, have the potential to instill healthy habits, promote regular physical activity, and educate children about balanced nutrition. However, the success of PE programs hinges not only on the efficacy of pedagogical strategies within school walls but also on a factor that transcends classroom boundaries - parental support.

The role of parents in shaping a child's health behaviors cannot be overstated. In India's dynamic cultural context, where family plays a central role, parental influence on dietary choices, physical activity patterns, and lifestyle norms is profound. This research paper aims to delve into the crucial nexus between parental support and the reduction of childhood obesity through physical education in India's contemporary era.

**Childhood obesity in India:** Childhood obesity is a burgeoning health challenge in India,

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reflecting a global trend of increasing rates of overweight and obesity among children and adolescents. India's diverse population, with a rich tapestry of cultures, dietary habits, and lifestyles, contributes to the complex landscape of childhood obesity.

**Prevalence and Trends:** Current Statistics on Childhood Obesity in India: Recent data underscores the gravity of childhood obesity in the country. According to the Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey (CNNS) conducted in 2016-2018, approximately 10.1% of children and adolescents aged 5-19 years in India are overweight or obese. This prevalence has been steadily rising over the years.

- **Trends in Urban and Rural Areas:** Childhood obesity in India exhibits distinct trends in urban and rural areas due to differing lifestyles and access to resources:
- **Urban Areas:** Urbanization has led to shifts in dietary patterns and increased sedentary behavior. Children in urban areas are more exposed to processed foods, fast food outlets, and screen time. As a result, childhood obesity rates are higher in urban settings, with a prevalence rate of around 13.4%.
- **Rural Areas:** In rural areas, traditional dietary habits often persist, but access to healthcare and awareness about obesity-related health risks may be limited. However, rural regions are not immune to the obesity epidemic, with a prevalence rate of approximately 8.6% among children.

#### **Socio-Cultural Factors in Childhood Obesity in India:**

Childhood obesity in India is deeply influenced by a myriad of socio-cultural factors, which play a pivotal role in shaping dietary habits, lifestyle choices, and perceptions of weight and body image.

Role of Diet and Lifestyle in Indian Households:

- **Traditional Dietary Patterns:** India boasts a diverse culinary heritage, with a wide range of regional cuisines. Traditional Indian diets are often rich in grains, legumes, vegetables, and spices. However, contemporary lifestyles have witnessed a shift towards diets that are higher in processed foods, added sugars, and unhealthy fats, largely due to increased urbanization, modernization, and the availability of convenience foods.
- **Family-Centric Eating:** Indian households tend to place significant emphasis on communal dining. Family members often eat together, and meals are traditionally home-cooked, reflecting cultural values of togetherness and shared food experiences. However, changing work schedules and urbanization have led to a rise in eating out and consuming packaged foods, which can contribute to unhealthy dietary choices.

#### **Cultural Attitudes towards Weight and Body Image**

- **Prevalence of Thinness Ideals:** Historically, Indian culture has celebrated lean body types, associating them with health and beauty. However, in recent years, Western beauty standards have gained influence, and there is a growing aspiration for slimmer body ideals. This shift in perception can contribute to unrealistic body image expectations and may result in unhealthy dieting practices among children and adolescents.
- **Stigma Surrounding Overweight and Obesity:** Despite the prevalence of thinness ideals, there can be negative attitudes and stereotypes associated with overweight and obesity in India. Children who are overweight may face

discrimination or bullying, which can further compound the psychological and emotional challenges related to obesity.

**Physical Education in Indian Schools:** Physical education (PE) in Indian schools holds a critical role in promoting the overall health and well-being of students. While PE programs have been a part of the education system for decades, their implementation and effectiveness can vary widely across different regions and institutions.

**Importance of Physical Education:** Physical education (PE) is essential for the holistic development of students. It goes beyond physical fitness and sports, encompassing vital life skills like teamwork, discipline, and stress management. PE fosters overall well-being and contributes to a healthy, active lifestyle.

- **The Status of Physical Education in Indian Schools:** The status of PE in Indian schools varies widely. While many schools offer PE programs, the quality and implementation differ. Some face challenges such as limited resources and infrastructure, while others excel in promoting physical fitness and sports.
- **Government Initiatives and Policies:** The Indian government recognizes the importance of PE and has initiated policies to enhance its presence in schools. Programs like "Fit India Movement" promote physical activity, and policies aim to improve the quality of PE. These initiatives are vital for nurturing a healthier, fitter future generation in India.

#### **Challenges in Implementation in Physical Education:**

Physical education (PE) in Indian schools is a crucial component of a well-rounded education, aiming to promote physical fitness, sportsmanship, and overall health. However, several challenges and barriers hinder its effective implementation across the country.

- Many schools lack proper sports facilities and playgrounds, limiting opportunities for physical activities. Scarce sports equipment and resources hinder diverse PE programs. A shortage of qualified physical education instructors leads to inconsistent program quality. Limited funding restricts improvements in infrastructure and equipment. Poor maintenance of facilities and equipment can pose safety risks, discouraging participation in certain activities.
- Scarce sports equipment, including balls, fitness gear, and sporting goods, constrains the variety of activities that can be incorporated into physical education programs. Cramped or overcrowded environments hinder students' ability to engage in physical activities safely and effectively. Limited Access to Resources: Rural schools often face challenges in accessing resources and funding to support physical education initiatives. Disparities in resources and infrastructure between schools can result in unequal opportunities for physical education, perpetuating disparities in health and fitness among students.

#### **Parental Support and Its Impact in the Indian Context:**

Parental support in the Indian context holds immense significance in shaping the physical and mental well-being of children. With strong cultural ties emphasizing family values, parental involvement is pivotal in fostering healthy habits, promoting education, and instilling core values. In the context

of addressing challenges like childhood obesity and academic achievement, the role of parental support cannot be overstated, as it forms the bedrock of a child's holistic development in India.

- **Cultural Perspectives:** In India, parental support is deeply rooted in cultural values that emphasize family bonds and holistic well-being. Parents play a pivotal role in shaping children's lives, including their health and education. Cultural perspectives underscore the importance of parental involvement in nurturing physical, mental, and emotional development. Understanding these cultural values is essential for designing effective interventions that align with India's rich heritage while addressing contemporary challenges, such as childhood obesity and overall well-being.
- **Parental Involvement:** Parental support is synonymous with active parental involvement. Parents play a central role in shaping their children's lives, and their active engagement extends beyond guidance to encompass participation in fostering healthy habits, education, and overall well-being.

**Strategies for Enhancing Parental Support in Indian Schools:** Enhancing parental support in Indian schools is crucial for the holistic development of students. Several strategies can be employed to achieve this, including:

- **Parental Engagement Programs:** Schools can organize workshops, meetings, and informational sessions to involve parents actively in their children's education and well-being. These programs provide opportunities for parents to understand the school's goals, curriculum, and expectations, fostering a sense of partnership.
- **Community Collaboration:** Collaborating with local communities, non-profit organizations, and healthcare providers can create a support network for parents. Community initiatives can offer resources, workshops, and health education to empower parents in promoting their children's health and fitness.
- **Leveraging Technology:** Harnessing digital platforms, such as apps, websites, and social media, can facilitate communication between schools and parents. These platforms can provide access to resources, progress updates, and health-related information, making it easier for parents to stay engaged in their child's education and health.

**Case Studies and Successful Initiatives in India:** Exemplary Programs

Several exemplary programs and initiatives in India have demonstrated the positive impact of parental support on childhood obesity prevention and overall well-being. Here are a few noteworthy examples:

- **"Poshan Abhiyaan" (National Nutrition Mission):** This government-led initiative aims to reduce childhood malnutrition and obesity by educating parents about proper nutrition and encouraging breastfeeding and healthy eating practices. The program emphasizes community involvement and has made significant strides in improving child nutrition.
- **"Fit India Movement":** Launched by the Indian government, this nationwide campaign promotes physical fitness and sports participation among people of all ages, with a specific focus on schools. It encourages parental involvement in physical activities, fostering a culture of active living in families.

- **"Bala Janaagraha":** This civic education program in schools engages both students and parents in promoting community health and wellness. It includes initiatives like cleanliness drives, nutritional awareness campaigns, and physical fitness programs, all of which encourage parental participation.
- **"Udaan" by Tata Trusts:** This initiative works to combat childhood obesity by improving school infrastructure, offering nutrition education to students and parents, and promoting physical activity. It involves parents in advocating for healthier school environments and lifestyles.
- **"Saksham" by Cognizant Foundation:** Focused on holistic child development, Saksham incorporates parental involvement in health, nutrition, and education. It provides training to parents on various aspects of child well-being and emphasizes collaborative efforts between schools and families.

**Future Directions and Policy Recommendations:** several policy implications and recommendations should be considered:

- **Integrate Parental Support into Educational Policies:** Educational policies should explicitly recognize the role of parental support in children's health and well-being. Schools should be encouraged and incentivized to develop strategies that actively engage parents in promoting healthy habits.
- **Enhance Teacher Training:** Invest in training programs for physical education instructors and teachers to equip them with the knowledge and skills to engage parents effectively. This includes training on culturally sensitive communication and strategies for involving parents.
- **Develop Comprehensive Physical Education Guidelines:** Establish national guidelines for physical education programs that consider the unique needs of Indian students. These guidelines should emphasize inclusivity, age-appropriate activities, and a balanced approach to physical fitness.
- **Allocate Resources:** Increase funding for physical education infrastructure and equipment, particularly in underserved areas. Ensure that schools have access to the resources required to provide quality physical education.
- **Promote Community Partnerships:** Encourage collaboration between schools and local communities, including healthcare providers, non-profit organizations, and businesses. Such partnerships can provide additional resources and support for parental engagement initiatives.
- **Leverage Technology for Parental Communication:** Develop and implement digital platforms and mobile applications that facilitate communication between schools and parents. These platforms can be used to share information, provide resources, and track students' progress in physical education.
- **Incorporate Parental Engagement in School Evaluations:** Include parental involvement in the criteria for evaluating schools' performance. Recognize and reward schools that excel in fostering parental support and creating a healthy school environment.
- **Monitor and Evaluate Initiatives:** Establish a system for monitoring and evaluating the impact of parental support initiatives on childhood obesity rates and overall well-being. Use this data to refine policies and practices continually.
- **Advocate for Holistic Health Education:** Encourage a

curriculum that integrates health education, including nutrition, mental health, and physical fitness, into the regular academic curriculum. Ensure that students receive a well-rounded education that emphasizes the importance of a healthy lifestyle.

- **Raise Awareness:** Launch public awareness campaigns to educate parents, communities, and policymakers about the critical role of parental support in reducing childhood obesity. Highlight the long-term benefits of healthy living.

### Conclusion

In India's contemporary era, the battle against childhood obesity stands as a significant public health challenge, one that necessitates a multi-faceted approach rooted in parental support and effective physical education. The role of parents in shaping the health behaviors and habits of their children cannot be overstated, especially within the rich tapestry of cultural perspectives and values that define India's society.

Cultural traditions and familial bonds lie at the heart of Indian society, making parental involvement a linchpin in fostering holistic well-being. The cultural perspectives that place immense importance on family dynamics and parental influence provide a robust foundation upon which efforts to combat childhood obesity can be built. However, it is crucial to harness this cultural strength and align it with contemporary health goals.

The prevalence of childhood obesity in India is on the rise, particularly in urban areas, as dietary patterns shift towards processed foods and sedentary lifestyles become more common. This underscores the urgency of addressing the issue through effective physical education programs and active parental support. Physical education, when thoughtfully designed and implemented, holds the potential to instill healthy habits, promote regular physical activity, and educate children about balanced nutrition.

However, the success of physical education programs within Indian schools hinges significantly on the extent of parental support. Parental involvement goes beyond merely encouraging children to participate in physical activities; it encompasses creating a conducive environment at home, setting positive examples, and instilling values of health and fitness. In the Indian context, this often means balancing cultural traditions with modern health knowledge.

Parents play a critical role at home in preventing childhood obesity, with their role changing at different stages of their child's development. By better understanding their own role in influencing their child's dietary practices, physical activity, sedentary behaviors, and ultimately weight status, parents can learn how to create a healthful nutrition environment in their home, provide opportunities for physical activity, discourage sedentary behaviors such as TV viewing, and serve as role models themselves.

To achieve this delicate balance and realize the potential of parental support, policymakers, educators, and communities must collaborate. Policy recommendations emphasize the need to integrate parental involvement into educational policies, enhance teacher training, and develop comprehensive physical education guidelines. Adequate allocation of resources, leveraging technology for parental communication, and promoting community partnerships are vital steps forward.

In conclusion, India's fight against childhood obesity can find its greatest ally in the active participation of parents. By recognizing the cultural perspectives that underpin family

values and by implementing effective policies and strategies, India can not only address childhood obesity but also set the stage for a healthier, more vibrant future for its children. The journey may be challenging, but the collective efforts of parents, schools, communities, and policymakers can transform the landscape of childhood health in India, ensuring that the nation's youth grow up with the tools and values needed to lead healthy, fulfilling lives.

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