

# Example of research paper on childhood obesity

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Obesity is defined as a medical condition in which there is excessive accumulation of fat within the body specifically adipose tissue which leads to an increase in the incidences of health problems such as diabetes and cardiovascular diseases and by extension a reduction in life expectancy. The other definition that is commonly accepted is that obesity is a medical condition characterized by a person having a Body Mass Index (BMI) that is greater than 30kg/m<sup>2</sup>. Obesity is classified into three categories: class I, class II, and class III. A person with BMI of between 30 and 34.9 falls in the category of class I obesity. A person with a BMI of 35-39.9 falls into the category of class II obesity. A person with a BMI above 40 falls into the category of class III obesity. It's caused by a combination of excessive intake calorific food, little or no physical activity, and genetic predisposition. The more common terms used when referring to the different categories of obesity are severe obesity, morbid obesity and super obesity for class I, II or III obesity respectively.

Peer pressure refers to “ the influence exerted on an individual by the peer group thus influencing the individual to change their behavior, beliefs, and values in order to conform to the norms of the group. Peer pressure can be classified as positive or negative. The youth are the ones who are mostly affected by peer pressure since they are easily influenced in their search for an identity and acceptance among their peers. Some of the positive impacts of peer pressure are: influencing an individual to participate in charitable activities or be part of a sports team or take up playing a musical instrument. Some of the negative impacts of peer pressure are: influencing an individual to indulge in risky behavior such as promiscuous sex, excessive consumption

of alcohol or drug abuse. Obesity and peer pressure are two social issues that are quite prevalent in society. Their impact on young people cannot be ignored hence this paper shall aim at examining the causes, the impact and the challenges met in addressing these two issues.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Obesity in USA has become a national epidemic that has led to the skyrocketing of the cost of health care by billions. It is estimated that in the past 30 years, the number of obese adults has doubled while the number of obese children has tripled. The percentage of obese children aged between 10 and 17 years is estimated to be at or more than 30% in 30 states in the United States of America. Surveys further reveal that each state carries its own burden of an increasing population of obese children with some states such as Mississippi having a staggering 32.5% of its population as obese. The prevalence of childhood obesity in America is made even more evident by the fact that currently, only 19 states have a prevalence rate of childhood obesity of less than 25%.

The increase in the number of obese children is particularly a matter of grave concern given that over 80% of obese children are likely to become obese adults. The work force on the other hand has heavily been affected by this national epidemic as more and more people are less healthy and less productive while those expected to take up their places are on fast track towards the same direction. If the trend continues unabated, the current generation of children will be the first generation of children that will live for fewer years than their parents.

## **Peer pressure**

Peer pressure refers to influence that is exerted on an individual by the peer group therefore influencing the individual to change his or her behavior, beliefs or values in order to conform to the norms of the group. Peer pressure mostly affects young people given that they seek to find their identity in addition to looking for acceptance among their friends. Peer pressure can be classified as positive or negative depending on the impact it has on an individual. However, research has shown that peer pressure influences young people to engage in behavior that is typically frowned upon by society. For instance, the Kaiser foundation found that 50% of the young people are inclined to indulge in sex as a result of peer pressure.

## **Factors that lead to obesity**

Genetic susceptibility to obesity is regarded as one of the leading causes of obesity. Genetics play a significant role in the determination of a child's metabolic rate in addition to the tendency of the child to participate in physical activities. Genetics also determine the lean body mass that a child is born with therefore predetermining the tendency to be overweight/obese. Research has shown that genetic susceptibility contributes to up to 40% of the risk of obesity even for twins born and raised in different environment. A child born to obese parents has 75% greater chances of becoming overweight with the chances of obesity ranging between 25% and 50% if one of the child's parents is obese.

According to research, Americans consumed 300 more calories in 2002 than they did in 1985, a trend that trickles down to children and continues to

spread with each passing year. Most children have easy access to foods that are high in calories in the supermarkets and in their school canteens. There is little regard that goes into the selection of the foods provided by schools as part of the feeding programs which further enhances the access to foods that are high in calories and fat. Fresh, healthy foods in most urban areas are quite expensive in the supermarkets as compared to unhealthy foods. For Americans with an average or low income, it is often cheaper to purchase the more inexpensive, unhealthy foods thus children in such homes have to do with foods that have high calories and fat content.

The pressure for students to excel students means that more and more students have to spend more time reading and doing assignments thus reducing the amount of time that should be spent engaging in physical activities. It is recommended that children and adolescents ought to engage in 60 minutes of vigorous physical activity daily but studies have shown that the youth in America do not meet this requirement. Instead most of them spend most of their time watching television or on the computer while consuming fast foods. This contributes to the increase in the number of children who are overweight and obese. The communities in America are centered around driving rather than walking or riding a bicycle. Most children take a bus to school or are driven to school by parents on their way to work. As a result they are denied the opportunity to engage in any form of exercise which would be beneficial in burning calories therefore aid in the prevention of obesity.

Young people have impressionable minds thus marketing and advertising campaigns often have a huge impact on them. Given the widespread preference of the use of electronic media as a form of entertainment in homes across America, the well packaged adverts regarding different brands of “ fruit juices,” potato chips, cookies, pizzas and pies influence most young people to consume greater quantities of unhealthy foods. Fad diets are also widely advertised therefore the youth are drawn to try eating as per the trends instead of eating healthy foods.

A recent survey established a link between chemicals present in the environment and the occurrence of obesity among children. The specific chemicals that were linked to obesity were phthalates which disrupt the function of the endocrine system therefore interfere with the glands and hormones responsible for regulatory functions within the body. The study revealed that the levels of phthalates were higher in children who were overweight /obese. The levels of phthalates were also found to be significantly higher among children in the United States as compared to other children.

### **Factors leading to peer pressure**

Conforming to the norms particularly the negative behaviors by young people is often as a result of the desire to fit in and be a part of the “ cool kids” whether it is at school or in other social settings. Smoking, drinking, and promiscuity are viewed as “ cool” partly because of the portrayal of these behaviors as acceptable by movie stars. Given that most young people spend most of their time watching television or on the internet, their

perception of the impact of indulging in such behavior is shaped to a large extent by electronic media. Low self-esteem is also a contributing factor to conformation to the norms of a peer group. Teenagers who are insecure about their body image or weight are likely to give in to peer pressure thus engage in behaviors such as smoking, drinking or promiscuous sex in order to fit in.

## **Implications of obesity**

The problem of obesity in the American society gets worse with each passing day with recent estimates from the American Academy of Child Adolescent Psychiatry indicating that 10-33% of children in the United States of America are not just fat, they are obese. Obesity gives rise to numerous health problems among them psychological issues. The health implications of obesity include a greater risk of cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, hypertension and certain types of cancers. The greatest threat to the American children and adolescent is diabetes with estimates revealing that 2 million Americans aged between 12 and 19 suffer from diabetes. More than 80% of the people diagnosed with diabetes are obese. Center for Disease Control predicts that if current trends are anything to go by, 48.3 million Americans will have diabetes by the year 2050.

Type 2 diabetes which is more prevalent among older people now accounts for more than 45% of new diagnosed cases of pediatric diabetes. The link between cancer and being overweight is not fully understood although it is speculated that excessive fat alters the normal growth and functions of the cells. Children who are obese are at a greater risk of having complications

such as elevated blood pressure, kidney failure, high cholesterol levels, gall bladder obstruction, asthma, and joint problems. They also have low self-esteem, anxiety, depression and are likely to be bullied at school and becoming bullies. A survey conducted among 40, 000 American s concluded that there is a correlation between obesity and depression. According to the study, people who are obese have 56% chance of being depressed with the tendency increasing if a person is morbidly obese.

Young girls who are obese are likely to have menstrual disturbances in addition to having an increased risk of suffering from polycystic ovarian syndrome. Teenage mothers who are obese are four times more likely to develop gestational diabetes which puts them at risk of developing Type II diabetes later on. Children who are obese have been found with neck arteries that prematurely age and possess the characteristics of those of a 45 year old. Research has also demonstrated that there is a high correlation between obesity and incidence of depression. There is also likelihood that a child who is obese is likely to become an obese adult with studies putting the chances of this happening at more than 80%. Approximately 60% of the children who are obese possess at least one of the risk factors for cardiovascular disease such as elevated high blood pressure, high cholesterol levels, or blood pressure. At least 25% or more have two or more risk factors for cardiovascular disease.

Young people who are obese are likely to be teased by their peers because of their weight. As a result of the teasing and the bullying, they tend to have suicidal thoughts since they spend most of their time alone. The isolation



often leads them to eat more as seek comfort from the pain of being teased. They are likely to become binge eaters and try out fad diets which further aggravate the problem they have with their weight.

## **Implications of peer pressure**

Peer pressure often has negative impacts on young people. Most young people are introduced to addictive behaviors such as smoking, drinking alcohol or taking drugs such as cocaine and heroin. This has a negative impact on the health of the young person who indulges in them. Smoking for instance results in an increase in the heart beat of an individual such that the heart beats two to three times faster than that of nonsmokers. Young people who smoke are likely to have less endurance when engaging in physical activities and are at risk of contracting lung cancer at an early age. Drinking alcohol on the other hand puts an individual at risk of liver cirrhosis, impairs physical coordination and judgment. Cocaine and heroin abuse leads to impairment of judgment, mal-absorption of food and delinquency.

## **Challenges in addressing obesity and peer pressure**

In order to address the problem of obesity, it is important to offer healthier food options to young people. Most schools have integrated such programs into the school curriculum but still have snack bars, vending machines, and canteens that offer foods which have high calories and high fat content.

While majority would like to adhere to a healthy eating regimen, they often can't resist the urge to get unhealthy snacks that are readily available. The government has also instituted the National Lunch Program in order to promote healthier eating among children. However, its implementation has

been met by several challenges. It is viewed as a program that targets children from low income neighborhoods. While they readily eat the lunch that they are provided with, their wealthy counterparts continue to eat unhealthy snacks available from vending machines and school canteens.

Efforts to address peer pressure are thwarted by the fact that young people are constantly bombarded with images from the electronic media showing their “ idols” indulging in behaviors such as smoking, drinking, and promiscuous sex. It therefore becomes difficult for them to choose a different path for themselves since they want to be associated with the “ cool” people they see on television. There are neighborhoods that are run by gang members who still go to local schools. Such adolescents threaten those who refuse to be a part of the activities that they engage in therefore forcing them to comply. The gang members sometimes offer rewards such as money, clothes, or tickets to attend concerts to their school mates who agree to be a part of the activities they engage in regardless of how harmful these activities may be. Most American parents have little or no time to spend with their children therefore rarely impact the lives of their children positively. The young people are therefore vulnerable to whatever influence they come across as they seek acceptance and guidance from their peers.

## **Methodology**

In light of the prevalence and impact of obesity, I shall conduct a study on the link between peer pressure and obesity among adolescents. Peer pressure can have negative impacts on young people. Obesity on the other hand is as a result of intake of foods that are high in calories. Most

adolescents spend most of their time with their peers therefore their food choices are to a large extent dependent on their peers. While parents might encourage their children to consume healthy foods by packing lunch for them, the adolescents often opt to eat fast food since that is what their peers are consuming. My study shall revolve around this link in schools within this area. 15 schools shall be surveyed with a sample of students aged between 14 and 17 participating in the study.

The study shall involve giving the subject a food diary which they will fill out daily during the period of the study. In addition to this, questionnaires shall also be administered in order to determine the influence that peers have on the choices of food made by the subjects. After that, the questionnaires shall be collected and the data analyzed in order to determine the correlation between peer pressure and obesity. Graphs shall be used to represent the data obtained in addition to pie charts. Information obtained from the study can be used by educational institutions in order to come up with policies meant to shift the eating habits of American teens. In understanding the influence that peers have on each other in regard to food choices, the educational institutions can be compelled to scrap the menus comprising of fast foods and include better, healthier foods in the school menus.

## **Conclusion**

Childhood obesity and peer pressure are two major social issues that affect the physical and mental/emotional health of children. Unless measures are taken to address the negative impact of the two issues, the negative impacts shall continue to affect the youth and the society at large.

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