Obesity Prevention In Communities: The Pacific OPIC Project

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Introduction

- Rising levels of obesity in school-age children are causing increasing concern. Preliminary result of OPIC baseline data informs us that 22% of students (n=7169) are either overweight or obese (OPIC DATA).
- Food/Diet and Physical Activity are key Risk Factors to obesity.
- School Canteens play active role in providing healthy food choices for school children.
- Important for the schools to increase the healthiness of food sold in school canteens.
- Parents to limit the amount of money given to students to spend on unhealthy foods.
Healthy Youth Healthy Community (OPIC Fiji)

- Project background/Aim
- Intervention settings
- Selected study results
  - Baseline study
  - Socio-cultural study
  - School Audit study
Baseline Data - Methodology

- 18 secondary schools in the island of Viti Levu in Fiji participated in the study
- 7237 students participated in the study
  - Gender - Females 53%, Males 47%
  - Age - More students age 13-16yrs (84%)
  - Ethnicity - Indigenous Fijians 43%, Indo Fijians – 52%, Others – 5%
- Self-administered questionnaires using Personal Digital Assistants (PDA) – completed in classroom with physical body measurements
Selected Results - baseline survey

- 22% of students are classified as either overweight or obese

- The Indigenous students were most likely to be overweight/obese (39% female; 22% male) while the Indo-Fijian students were most likely to be thin (31% female; 35% males).

- 30% of students reported having missed breakfast in one or more days in the last 5 school days

- Almost two-thirds of adolescents consumed one serve of fruit or less each day

- A high proportion of students (62% female and 50% male) get food for recess from the school canteen

- High proportion of students drank regular soft drinks and/or fruit flavoured drinks
Socio cultural In-depth interview

**Methods**
- 24 males and 24 females from each cultural groups
- Interviewers were of the same sex as participants, spoke the same first language
- Interviews were recorded, transcribed and translated to English when necessary
- Interviews were coded into categories using N6 software, analyzed and co-analyzed.
Selected results - Socio cultural In-depth interview

- **Messages**
  - Knowledge of healthy foods and its value and able to concentrate in school

- **Eating pattern**
  - Knowledge about healthy foods and eating pattern not translated to practice
  - School canteens as source of foods at recess time
  - Spending money used to buy junk food not monitored by parents

- **Messengers**
  - More mothers provide home messages about food than fathers
  - Friends influence at-school choices
  - Mixed messages – lessons learnt in classroom to that provided in school canteens
School Audit – Food and nutrition

Written policy

- 4 schools reported having written policy to promote and support nutrition and healthy eating

Canteen

- All operate canteen
- 4 schools reported they operated the canteen
- 6 reported it as an important source of income
Snacks sold in school canteens

- 4 schools reported having contracts with food manufacturer for exclusive rights to sell products at school
- Only 2 schools reported their school routinely promoted healthy food choices
Drinks sold in school canteens

- 4 schools reported having contracts with soft drink and food manufacturer for exclusive rights to sell products at school
- Open all day in most schools
Parents Responsibility

- Make sure that your children have a proper healthy breakfast everyday before school.
- Encourage your child to have three serving’s of fruit & vegetable everyday.
- Give your child choices of what he or she wants to eat, within the boundaries of what is healthy and affordable.
- Discourage children from eating unhealthy food or junk food by providing healthy snacks.
- Invest in your children's health.
Healthy School Canteens

A healthy school canteen is one that:
- provides a choice of foods for students
- promotes healthy food which is of good quality, tasty and affordable
- supports classroom teaching
- is appropriate for the school community
- is able to make some profit
- provides ways to encourage students to buy healthy foods
Advertising and marketing in schools

- School Health Notice Boards
- Pamphlets
- Posters
- OPIC Website
- Newsletter
- Words by mouth
- Assembly talks
Promotion – breakfast and lunch
Promotion of Fruits vs energy dense - snacks
Promotion of water vs sugary drinks
What Faith Based Organizations are doing
Translation to strategies

- Students and families were taught time management to encourage regular breakfast and prepare school lunches at home.
- Students are actively engaged in the healthy food campaign.
- Some school canteens are providing improved services.

VALUING YOUR CHILD’S HEALTH ALSO MEANS VALUING YOUR CHILD’S ABILITY TO LEARN.
Acknowledgement

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