

## SELECTED PREDICTORS OF OVERWEIGHT AMONG NIGERIAN KIDS

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### ABSTRACT

*Flabby looks generally in human beings is as a result of out of shape which is a total product of overweight. Overweight is closely associated with laziness and clumsy look which no one desires. Kids who do not really know the implications are recently the most venerable. Kids who are flabby are prone to a lot of modern ailments. The tendency of the present day kids to live a sedentary life, with the idea of eating disorder and sweet drinking habits have caused the flabbiness of the kids in our society. This development leaves the entire society at risk. This paper discussed some of the predictors of overweight, its implication to fitness and control measures. It concluded by saying that kids who are out of shape are faced with multi-dimensional problems which should not be treated with levity. Based on the discussions reached, recommendations were made that (a) there should be awareness campaign focused on the importance of physical activities to the health of the kids. (b) parents should be educated on the type of foods and drinks their kids need. (c) Nutrition education should be a vital part of school curriculum at primary and post primary schools in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Overweight, physical activities, fitness, ailments and safety

### INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education during the 1960s and 1970s has been changed and shaped by powerful forces from within and outside the profession. Changing concerns in the society and economy, in theories of learning and child development, and subject matter content have all had their influence. As such, all persons who guide the development of young children need an understanding of the changes.

For the past 10 years, Nigerian kids have steadily gained weight. Parents, teachers and scientists have been searching for ways to help reverse the trend. The reasons they gain and lose weight are complex. Some have learned, and involve more than just diet and exercise, yet no positive result.

Childhood is the onset of active life of every human being and play is one of its prominent characteristics as a result, children actively get involved in physical activities of all kinds not necessarily organized or planned. In the school, church or at home play is the one activity that is included, almost without exception, in all early childhood programmes. According to Butler (1970), there are vast differences in what is meant by play and what is believed to be its relative value. There are teachers at nursery, primary and secondary schools who feel that free play has little merit and should be replaced with educational play. But in accordance with nature, this aspect of the children life style in the time past gave them natural resistance to overweight and kept them physically fit, because periods for their physical activities were mostly designed by them and it can take place any where at any time without any officiating officials and with their own rules.

### A Healthful Environment

The environment determines to a considerable extent the quality of healthful living possible in any situation. Health is a state of physical, mental, and social well being and depends upon the interaction of these dimensions. Health is dynamic, in that it is ever changing. Health is influenced by the interaction of many hereditary and environmental factors and conditions over which the individual

may exercise varying amounts of control. Some aspects of every one's health can be improved. (Ama, 1965).

Before now in most Nigerian societies, moon light period was a prominent time for various out door physical activities and recreation which provided fun, avenue for interaction and enhanced physical fitness among children. It was observed that children at that time were more active and attractive. It was natural to expect children to respond more promptly to emergency situations that called for their prompt reaction.

The health of young children who are the future adults has been identified as an area of special concern by physical educators. As a child who is in poor health will function at a level considerably lower than that of a healthy child.

### **Today Nigerian Children**

Lack of participation in outdoor activities has obviously enhanced overweight among children. Moore (1999) stated that today's children have significantly less endurance than their counterparts of 15 years ago. A mere physical observation of the victims of this condition leave a high level of pity because of the obvious health challenges they have or will face to their detriment and that of the society. According to Kopelman (2005), the term overweight or out of shape rather than obesity is often used in children, it is less stigmatizing. He further described childhood obesity as a condition where excess body fat negatively affects a child's health or well being.

All functional human society requires an effective performance in any human endeavour which requires an acceptable level of physical fitness. These children in question are leaders of tomorrow. The question is, will the challenges of obesity allow them to function effectively, to be the types of leaders their generation would hold at high esteem? Adelekun (1990) identified the following as qualities basic to physical fitness:

- (a) Body composition
- (b) Cardiovascular ability
- (c) Motor skill
- (d) Muscular strength
- (e) Flexibility and neurological efficiency

### **Out of Shape and Flabby Child**

Flabby in this paper is defined as a part of a person's body soft, loose, and over fleshy and not tightly controlled and therefore ineffective. This is a condition that can trigger a host of serious diseases conditions, like obesity. The moment the child is flabby, the child is out of shape.

Overweight or flabby which is the excess body fat, defined as body mass index (BMI) over 30%, is a disease said to exist when an individual exceeds the ideal body weight by 20 percent, or when the percent body fat value of a man is more than 25 percent. It is also the surplus or excess body fat for a specific body weight. This have been observed to be the cause of kids being out of shape and getting flabby. According to a professor of dermatology at Harvard Medical School Anderson, genetics plays a big role in the amount of fat we have and where we have it. And a lot of people, no matter how much they exercise and diet, are going to have those pads on their thighs with a significant difference. (Readers Digest January, 2007).

It is the purpose of this paper to discuss five selected predictors responsible for Nigerian kids out of shape and getting flabby, and some control measures.

## Predictors and Possible Control Measures Of Overweight

The future looks bright for the development of effective and well tolerated drugs. It is better to target the latest medication to treat underlying factors such as high cholesterol, high blood pressure and high blood sugar. We are going to have many more choices to treat out of shape and flabby children. Here are some of the most exciting advances:

**Poor eating habit:** It is common knowledge that children nowadays have more variety of foods- and soft drinks at their disposal, most of which are very sweet and loved by children. Sweet foods and drinks are mostly of high calories which predisposes them to overweight. Bessesen (2008), Reader's digest (2007), all observed that high calorie drinks and foods are readily available to children. Fast food joints and restaurants give out toys to entice children to eat and drink more, thereby exposing most children to in between meals and over feeding which possible causes of overweight. Nwajei (1990) stated that modern condition of food preparation frequently stimulate the appetite, prompts one to consume food and sweet drinks far in excess of the body's requirements.

Dr. David Haslam, director of the National Obesity Forum (Special Report 2007) stated, that some people seem able to eat like a horse yet stay slim, while others gain weight much more easily. Some people get hungrier sooner, others are emotional eaters.

It is better to eat less fat. Begin meals with a broth-based soup or low-fat salad of 150 calories or less.

Reduce trans and saturated fats and processed foods which stimulate inflammation in the liver, and contribute to diabetes, high cholesterol and hypertension. Load up on fruits and vegetables, but make sure they are not covered in fat, salt or sugar. Protein and carbohydrates have four calories per gram. While fat has nine. When children eat less fat, they consume fewer calories without having to eat less. Refined carbohydrates (white bread, rice, pasta or crackers) are absorbed and quickly converted into fat, so it is better to go for a whole grain instead. (Readers digest 2007).

The children should eat food with high water content, such as broth-based soup, this fills the children up more than sipping water with their foods. They should eat more of fibre-rich foods to reduce the number of calories it takes to feel full and pick unsalted, raw (not roasted) nuts. Soft drinks are full of sugar and calories. Children should have only a can of soft drink a day (sports and energy drinks are just as calorie laden as other fizzy drinks) and the children will drop about a stone in a year. Children with flabby bodies should also take a lot of fresh tomatoes; tomatoes have the type of phytochemicals that will prevent joints and muscles from becoming damaged by fat.

**Ignorance of Parents:** Parents often misinterpret the word "Love" to their children. Most parents' demonstration of "Love" to their kids results to the detriment of such kids. In today's Nigeria parents provide different types of juice drinks, ice cream, chocolates, biscuits, sweets, chewing gums etc for their kids as exhibition of love. While some parents are with the views that physical activities participation are punishment and show lack of care to their children. In some parts of the country, some tribes misconstrues overweight as a sign of wealth.

It is observed that some parents serve meals without considering the nutritional value and need of their children; hence they become architects of their children's weight challenges. Lack of nutritional knowledge promotes food faddism which is another determinant of out of shape and flabbiness.

Parents should be educated on these issues of loving their children wrongly. Food and sweet drinks should be regulated and served at the appropriate time and according to body needs. (Blackledge 1994; Bradley 1998).

**Safety Concern of Children:** There is an alarming rate of crime in our Nigerian society that calls for proper safety care of kids either at school or home. Parents restrict children from outdoor activities immediately after school hours. They ensure kids are not exposed to security risks of the society. Children are no longer having freedom to go out and play or visit their follow kids without proper protection by their parents. In support of this Moore (1996) stated that many children who stay home alone after school hours are required by parents to stay inside with the door locked rather than play outside. He went further to say that today's parents are more likely to drive their kids everywhere they

go rather than let them walk or ride their bike as previous generations did. However, parents should provide an alternative recreation and physical activity areas in their houses.

**Inactive Recreational Activities:** The emergence of advance technology in our society has its own influence on the lifestyle of children. Play which is a prominent characteristic of childhood is almost relegated to the background as children prefer television programmes and computer games at their leisure time. It is an established fact that inactivity promotes overweight-which results to out of shape, flabby and finally obesity. Makanjuola (1998) opined that vigorous activities during leisure promote the development of body ingredients like muscular strength, muscular endurance, poor flexibility, agility and coordination which are basic components of fitness.

Kids should be educated on the values of regular physical activities, that it improves strength, endurance, helps to build bones and muscles, it helps to control weight, reduce anxiety, stress, increase self esteem and may also improve blood pressure and cholesterol levels (American Sports Data 1999; Bell 1998; Benneth 1991; Bunker 1998 & The centre for disease control and prevention 1996). Children should be guided to properly utilize their leisure hours in recreation.

### IMPLICATION FOR FITNESS

A overweight child has serious implication for fitness. It's associated clumsiness has inherent stigma which could negatively influence the victim's involvement in physical activities with other children even when the child is interested and has the opportunity. He is with the feelings that his colleagues will laugh at him. Low or non-participation in physical activities would hamper the achievement of optimal fitness in the victim.

Obviously, out of shape and flabby conditions are as a result of overweight which results to a disease called obesity. In spite of its serious implications, it can be controlled.

### CONCLUSION

Researchers have to deter more people from becoming obese, out of shape and flabby in the first place. One can change his shape by changing his lifestyle. All exercise counts, any exercise over and above what you normally do, that gets you out of breath and moving, is good. This might just mean walking to the end of the street and back.

Think about what you eat, and enjoy it, bit by bit. Parents and children should be made to understand the disadvantages of overweight. It is better not to allow this condition (overweight) to occur than to plan how to control it. Costly drug treatments and dieting cannot be seen as the sole solution. People have to deter themselves from becoming obese in the first place. You can change your shape by changing your lifestyle.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Therefore, in pursuit of the quest for optimal health for the Nigerian children to be free from overweight and flabby, the following should be embraced:

- a. There should be awareness campaign focused on the importance of physical activities to the health of the kids.
- b. Parents' Teachers Association (PTA) should be interested on policies emphasizing the way of improving physical fitness of the children at school.
- c. Parents especially mothers should be well guided on the choice of food and eating habits of their children.
- d. Parents should be educated on the disadvantages of overweight in children, that it is not evidence of good living rather a gate to diseases.
- e. Children should be encouraged to eat and drink less sweet things with fat. They should be encouraged to be involve in vigorous physical activities daily.

- f. Nutrition education should be a vital part of school curriculum at primary and post primary schools

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