



CASE STUDY :: 01

LOCATION

Obesity Prevention In Communities (Opic)

Australia, New Zealand, Fiji and Tonga

OBJECTIVES

Tackling obesity

BACKGROUND

Throughout the world the prevalence of obese people is growing rapidly. In the Pacific Islands obesity is a major epidemic. This is a four country project with the developing country component housed within the Fiji School of Medicine. There are two slightly different components:

Fiji: Healthy Youth Healthy Community (HYHC)

Tonga: Ma’alahi Youth Project (MYP)

The project is unique in that the analytical and intervention studies are being conducted simultaneously. There is a real spirit of partnership and sharing amongst the project sites in the four countries.

“An effective response to obesity faces many barriers. Culturally, large physical size is considered a mark of beauty and social status on many Pacific Island countries. At a community and policy-making level, there is resistance to the view that obesity is a health problem. Many Pacific Island countries and territories depend on imported food, with commercial interests more likely to favour imports of high-fat, energy dense foods. As food preferences among consumers in the Pacific change, imported and convenience food is afforded higher status. High rates of violence and crime reduce the opportunities for outdoor physical activity. For islands in transition, the inevitable growth in the use of modern technology sharply reduces physical activity and thus energy expenditure, adding to the problems created by the increase in sedentary occupations in urban areas of the Pacific region”.

Excerpts from a Report on The Workshop on Obesity Prevention and Control Strategies in the Pacific. “Obesity in the Pacific Too Big To Ignore

9

PURPOSE

The project focuses on changing behaviour, enhancing appropriate skills, and changing / improving the environment to reduce the rate of obesity through increased physical activity and improved healthy food choices. More specifically the project aims to:

- determine the overall impact of comprehensive community-based intervention in the Pacific (ie find effective ways of preventing obesity in Fiji and Tonga)
- identify the socio-cultural factors that promote or prevent obesity and how to influence them to produce positive outcomes
- estimate the cost burden (economic and health) and how resources can best be allocated to prevent obesity
- evaluate the effects of food-related policies that influence obesity.

PARTNERS

- Ministry of Health
- Ministry of Education
- Secondary Schools in the intervention area and the
- Comparative sites Church/religious groups in intervention area
- Local Town Council in intervention area
- Parents
- Private Businesses
- Teachers and Parents Associations
- International Organisations
- Women’s Groups
- Teachers
- Sports Council
- Four countries (Australia, New Zealand, Fiji and Tonga).

COST AND DATE

- Started 2004
- Project funded by Wellcome Trust, National Health and Medical Research Council, Health Research Council of New Zealand, World Health Organisation
- A five year project
- Budget approximately FJ\$2.2 millions for developing country component

TARGET

- Primarily youths/adolescents in secondary schools – 13-18 yrs and their families (to prevent weight gain in adolescents through physical activity and healthy eating)
- Secondary target are parents, church/religious groups in the community.

Rationale for targeting secondary school students

- They are at a critical age when lifelong attitudes and behaviour are developed and reinforced
- Looks count – early intervention is better!
- Concerned about positive self image and are more receptive to new ideas and change

- Good health has been proven to:
- improve academic performance
- lessen absenteeism
- contribute to more alert children hence able to concentrate better at school
- children get sick less hence saves resources
- produce adjusted children and better able to cope with problems
- promotes positive social behaviour

STEPS

1 In September 2000 representatives from 20 Pacific Island countries and territories met in Apia, Samoa to review obesity in the Pacific and to identify effective strategies for obesity control that governments could apply. The Workshop on Obesity Prevention and Control Strategies in the Pacific was convened by the World Health Organization Regional Office for the Western Pacific, in partnership with the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, the International Obesity Task Force, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the International Life Sciences Institute.

2 STAGE 1: Planning Year 1 & 2

- Determination and identification of intervention area and secondary schools
- Research Application approval by Ministry of Health
- Ethics Approval by Fiji Ethics Research Committee
- Consultation with major stakeholders. In the first instance: Ministry of Health; Secondary Schools
- Consultation with Community representatives through ANGELO (Analysis Grid for Environmental Linked to Obesity) workshop
- Advocacy and awareness in the community and stakeholders
- Baseline surveys

3 STAGE 2: Intervention Year 2-4 (to be implemented 2006)

- Development of specific Intervention programmes based on
 - > issues prioritized by the community during the ANGELO workshop
 - > preliminary findings from baseline
 - > socio-cultural focus groups and in-depth interviews and participatory research with adolescents
 - > assessment of readiness of the communities to address the obesity issues
 - > Examples of objectives for intervention in Fiji

GOAL:

To improve the health and wellbeing of individuals and strengthen the Nasinu Community through healthy eating and physical activity

OBJECTIVES:

- > To significantly increase the amount of active play after school and weekends and significantly reduce the time spent watching TV and playing on computers or electronic games
- > Support physical education teachers in schools conduct PE classes effectively

4 STAGE 3: Evaluation of project outcome Year 5

OUTCOMES/IMPACT

- Enhanced capacity of the communities to sustain obesity prevention
- Enhanced skills of locals in research
- Professional development in project staff
- Identification of evidence-based culturally appropriate and effective ways of preventing obesity in small developing pacific islands countries that health workers can adopt
- Interest in maintaining healthy weight in adolescents that will continue into adulthood developed
- Reduction in weight gain in children attending secondary schools in the intervention area
- Increased level of physical activity in children
- Increased availability of healthy foods and safe water for drinking in schools

BENEFITS

- Better health (through supportive environment, improved diet and nutrition, and increased physical activity) for individuals and the community as a whole.
- Reduction in spend on health care

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This is a research product (policies) and the evidence of what and how will be available after the programmes have been evaluated.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This will only become available after the programme has been evaluated.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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