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Introduction

According to Bulmer (2015), involving communities in the planning of their own care provides a sense of belonging and social connectedness and is also one of the factors that contribute to health and wellbeing. Therefore, to promote community care and development, health care professionals need to work with communities to identify issues as the communities see them and empower them to set goals to address the health issues in order to promote health and wellbeing (GOV.UK, 2018). This report therefore explores the health and social care needs of the Basildon community, specifically on the issue of childhood obesity, identifies one initiative that has been adopted in the community to improve childhood obesity, and explores the method of communication used to share information on the initiatives with the community members.

Overview of Basildon

Basildon Borough is part of the 12 Boroughs in the County of Essex located at the East of England. Basildon Borough shares boundaries with Chelmsford to the north, to the south east with Borough of Castle Point, to the East by Rochford District and to west by Brentwood Borough. Borough of Basildon is the second largest district the the Essex Coty in terms of population (Basildon Council, 2023). According to Essex County Council (ECC), (2019), the estimated population of the Borough of Basildon based on the 2018 census was 185,862 people, with about 11.9% of the population representing children and young people who are below 18years. The Office of National Statistics (ONS) predicts that there will be a total of 41509 children below the age of 18 by the end of 2024, representing 21% of the population of the Borough of Basildon. The dominant religion in Basildon is Christianity, which represents about 47.9% of the population. Muslims account for approximately 1.63% of the population, with the remaining 4.3% belonging to other religions. In terms of ethnicity, White English, White Welsh, and White British account for 89.5% of the population, while Asians account for 3.7%, and Blacks and other people of mixed race accounting for the remaining 6.8%.

Problem Statement

Since the demographics of the Borough of Basildon are increasing, so is the need for health and social care. Relative to other councils in Essex, Basildon Council is lagging in many health outcomes (McKee et al., 2021). For instance, studies have shown prevalence of mental health problems, obesity, cancer, cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, and some other health-related issues. However, one of the most prevalent health issues the Basildon Council is the issue of obesity, especially in children.

Obesity is the accumulation of excess fat in the body and persons with a body mass index (BMI) of 30 is considered as obese and children with a BMI age percentile higher than 95% is also considered as obese (Naidoo and Wills 2016). It is very important to take action in addressing childhood obesity because aside from causing physical changes in appearance, it can also lead to a number of serious health challenges such as the risk high blood pressure, type2 diseases, heart related diseases and cancer (Lanigan, 2019). Moreover obesity is considered as the major cause of premature death and disability worldwide (WHO, 2021). Nevertheless, the Basildon Council (2021) reports that about 20.2% of children in their reception age and about 33.7% of pupils in year 6 are classed as obese.

Causes of obesity

Causes of this childhood obesity in the Basildon district include life style factors such as lack of exercise eating too much sugar and calories and some other risk factors including; genetics (eg. having an obese parent), certain health conditions (eg cushing's syndrome), and certain medications (like steroids, valproate and insulin), as well as environmental and socioeconomic factors such as eating unhealthy diet that may be due to poverty and studies have shown that childhood obesity is prevalence in low income households (ECC, 2016; ECC, 2019b).

Relating childhood obesity to theory, Bronfenbrenner's (1992) ecological system theory is a useful framework that explains the influence of childhood obesity as it identifies that a child's development is influenced by the child's immediate environment

(microsystem), socio-cultural structures, and public policies. Mattaie et al. (2021) reveal that the child's immediate environment encompasses people and institutions, which include families, peers, community groups, and schools. Mattaie et al. (2021) further explain that families have a greater influence on children's food choices and activity levels; providing unhealthy meals by the child's family may lead to unhealthy food habits that could lead to obesity; likewise, schools and community organizations also have an influence on children's healthy behavior by providing opportunities for children to be physically active and provide healthy food choices.

Also, Garriguet et al. (2018) opine that public policy as well as the media, which the theory refers to as the exosystem, can have influence on a child's development. For instance, the advertisement of unhealthy food choices, coupled with government policies that affect equal access and availability of food and creating opportunity for physical activities, may lead to obesity in children. Again, the mesosystem of the theory, which is about interactions between meso and microsystems, could also have influence on a child's development; for example, communication and coordination among parents, school administrators, and community program coordinators could lead to the creation of healthy food habits and promote physical activities (Garriguet et al., 2018). Hence interventions that addresses the micro and meso systems which include encouraging healthy habits in families and in schools as well as public policies can have a positive impact on childhood obesity.

Legislation/initiatives to improve childhood obesity in Basildon

The policy to address issue of childhood obesity was passed in 2016 by the UK government. The objectives of the policy which was dubbed 'Childhood obesity: A Plan for Action, included restrictions on advertising unhealthy foods to children, improving food labeling, and increasing funding for healthy meal programs, sports, and physical activities in schools. Based on this legislation, the Basildon Borough has also initiated several strategies, which include Best Start for Young People, which provides health visits, nutritional advice, free healthy food, and school nurse services to children age; creation of more green areas to encourage physical exercise. (Borough Council, 2021)

Presently, the Basildon District is working together with ECC to implement Livewell Child program. The Livewell Child Program aims to eliminate obesity in primary school children in the district. The intervention is a 3-year program that is co-designed by schools, families, and the local community to provide support for children to have a healthy weight and be more active through play and provides families with ideas and tips on how to eat healthy through quick, simple, and cheap methods (Livewell, 2023). Other services provided under the Livewell program include NHS Ten Minutes Shake Up games for children, activities for new parents, children cycling, and walking. All these activities are listed on the program's website, which can be accessed online. These activities have been programmed according to age and are suitable for all (Livewell 2023).

Method of communicating health Information on Obesity

According to Robinson (2022), communication is one of the top drivers of health promotion. Communicating is essential in health promotion because the Health Belief model indicates that individuals are able to attain a healthy lifestyle if they are aware and have enough information about the need to take actions and make corrections (Rosenstock, 2000). Hence, in order for children and their families to have enough information on childhood obesity, its causes and effects, as well as strategies being implemented within their vicinity, the program should be well communicated to the populace. Therefore the Basildon in Council has launched the community model communication campaign, which focused on using social media to provide all information on childhood obesity and the prevention strategies available in the Borough. This digital-first initiative aimed at bringing traditional methods into the digital space (Mid and South Essex NHS, 2022). This communication method typically relies on social media that is web-based and mobile technologies for communication, and research has proven a positive interconnection between the use of social media and preventive health behavior (Merchant 2020). The Livewell program is which was initially delivered face-to-face, has now included telephone calls, emails, virtual group chats (Whatsapp, Facebook, Instagram and other social media handles), mobile phone messages, or simply by downloading the program's app on a smart phone

Borough of Basildon may have adopted the use of social media in communication to their target audience probably because technological advancement has provided emerging tools that can be used to treat and prevent childhood obesity (Li et al., 2013). About 95% of residents in Basildon, including children in their adolescent age, have access to smart phones and computer and are connected to the internet, and the majority is active on online social media (ECC, 2019a). Hence, sharing information on the 'Livewell Child program through this medium was perhaps convenient and easily accessible. Nevertheless, Robinson et al. (2017) argue that although social media offers an easy and convenient medium for sharing information on weight management, excessive screen media exposure can also increase the risk of childhood obesity. Further research by Trofholz et al. (2019) children consume more calories whiles they watch television or screen social media. Therefore, to harness the positive impact of using social media to manage weight in children, the screening time of contents of program activities should be reduced (Trofholz et al., 2019).

Recommendations

The Centre for Diseases Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends having prevention and care management plans for managing children's weight at the community clinics and community hospitals. In this way, healthcare providers can start sharing information on healthy diet with parents' through their mobile phones right from childbirth and provide proven health services, complemented by community resources and strategies aimed at reducing childhood obesity. In order to have a consolidated and sustainable program aimed at reducing obesity, all commissioned projects aimed at preventing obesity should adopt the guidelines of local community programs in Basildon, which include the use of digital technology. All programs that aim at reducing obesity should also support signposting and referral to local sources that are implementing initiatives such as community walking, exercise, healthy cooking, commercial, and environmental weight loss groups. (ECC, 2016)

NICE (2021) recommends that community initiatives aimed at reducing childhood obesity focus on healthy individual behaviors that are easy to incorporate into daily life

activities such as walking, playing active video games, and running around, as this will help children easily adapt these behaviors in their daily lives.

Lastly, Smith et al. (2020) recommend for community health professionals to be healthy food champions and advocates for policy attention for equal access to food and provision of financial assistance to families with children from low income, as well as empowering families to prepare healthy meals on budget. The advocacy should also include the provision of free meals to schoolchildren on holidays.

Conclusion

In Basildon, the obesity crisis could become a "ticking time bomb" if practical solutions are not implemented. In light of this, public policies and programs and local partnerships that aim to promote healthy eating needs to be widely promoted and these programs and policies can be communicated through the use of social media which has been proven as a convenient method of communication. Although the use of digital media has many advantages, including being widely accessible in homes and schools, being well-liked by young people, being able to engage and immerse participants, and being able to offer quick, personalized feedback. These medium of communication has its own negative consequences (Merchant et al., 2020). Hence, parental involvement and interactive, bidirectional digital media interventions is needed to harness its positive potentials. Moreover, the implementation of evidence-based practices (recommendations) that aims at reducing obesity need to be strongly led and supported to eradicate childhood obesity in the Basildon Borough.

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