



A Healthier Tomorrow. One Smile at a Time.



Introduction

The development of general wellbeing depends on an awareness of the complex links between healthy habits and wellbeing. The physical, mental, and social aspects of wellbeing are all included in the definition of health as stated by the World Health Organisation. Studies have emphasised the value of community involvement, family health behaviours and early childhood psychological wellbeing in shaping children's growth. The relationship between lifestyle, wellbeing and health will be discussed, emphasising the role of socioeconomic status, education and access to healthcare are key factors that determine the future of children's development. There will be a discussion on how children's health is affected by poverty and financial difficulties, as well as how families and communities can help children develop healthy behaviours. Understanding the connections between lifestyle, wellbeing and health can help create a culture that places a higher priority on the welfare and the health of children.

Dahlgren and Whitehead Model



(Khandu, Tobgay, and McFarland, 2020).

Health

Health and wellbeing are interconnected which complement each other, while also influencing each other. World Health Organization's (WHO) encompasses the way people view themselves and the way individuals contrast circumstances with the norms and ideals of society (Department of Health, no date).

Singh (2020) claims health carries multiple meanings that vary depending on the context, culture, age groups and socioeconomic class. An overall feeling of wellbeing is called health, the activities that a physically fit person can perform demonstrate the state of health. Moreover, health is not just the absence of sickness but also complete bodily, mental, and social wellbeing (World Health Organization, 2024).

Hogg and Moody (2023) suggest that early childhood health is beneficial for children to comprehend and have control over their emotions, form loving, meaningful connections, engage in play, as well as exploration and learning. Furthermore, children who have good mental health may develop into strong adults with a wide range of skills (Inness, 2015). Additionally, Welsh Government (2022) claims that choices and behaviours that are acknowledged as good to an individual's future health, can be developed in a community where people's physical and mental wellness increases.

Fareed, Hussain and Abbas (2023) claim that public health seeks to prevent disease and harm, as well as encouraging healthy living and establishing conditions that foster wellbeing. Moreover, to promote healthy child development, effective communication could be established. Factors such as, global warming, physical activity, a nutritious diet and a healthy atmosphere all have an influence on the development (Subramanyam, Somaiya, and Sousa, 2024).

Condon and McClean (2017) mention that the health practices of parents, shape children's everyday lives and provide the groundwork for long-term health, especially in the early years of life. Danies *et al.* (2021) also agree that good family health fosters a sense of community, compassion and the ability to perform duties to support children's wellbeing.

The Dahlgren and Whitehead models have qualities that are linked to simplicity and demonstrates a thorough comprehension of the primary factors influencing health. Moreover, the model may present dangers to one's health that could be beneficial, harmful or neither (Dahlgren and Whitehead, 2021).

Mental, physical, and emotional wellbeing are all components of good health. Understanding this is beneficial to carers because it enables learners to identify the connections between various aspects of health. Children who understand this idea might have a better time managing risks, forming connections, taking on duties and communicating clearly (Hwb, 2020).



Health



Pwysiau Iach Plant Yng Nghyrmu (PIPYN) aims to support children aged three to seven and families in Merthyr Tydfil to achieve a healthy weight by providing free assistance in forming healthful behaviours. Incorporating topics like meal planning, physical play, healthy eating on a budget, and more (NHS Wales, no date).

Forming relationships with others can help children understand themselves and others better. The events that take place during this key period in the child's life provide the framework for good mental health, resilience and adaptability which are great life skills (Fitzgibbon and Canale, 2024).

During early years, children should eat a diet rich in nutrients. This lays the groundwork for future health and wellbeing, while supporting healthy development as well as maintaining a healthy weight (Vaughan Gething cited in Welsh Government, 2018a). Moreover, it is suggested that children form appropriate eating habits at an early age to sustain a healthy weight. Early eating habits are likely to be carried over into later childhood and adulthood based on available data (Early Years Wales, 2020). Welsh Government (2018b) also recommends that a balanced, healthy diet with regular physical activity will help build good eating habits to carry forward into the future.




Wellbeing



Musgrave (2017) defines wellbeing as a person's emotional state that is impacted by their social interactions. This helps young children develop resilience and self-reliance to enhance general welfare and mental health. Furthermore, wellbeing could be described as welfare, self-interest and quality of life. Wellbeing is positively impacted by things that help individuals and improve circumstances. On the other hand, things that negatively affect someone's wellbeing can be sad, unhealthy and harmful (Campbell, 2016). Therefore, early childhood educators are responsible for fostering the emotional wellbeing of children. Teachers need to be competent and self-assured in identifying poor health and wellbeing and the effect it has on children's development, making sure that a child is making progress and improving (Peill, 2022).

National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children Learning (NSPCC) (2021) claims that the mental health of children is fundamental to their overall wellbeing and is influenced by several factors such as, family dynamics, the environment, stress, social isolation and loneliness. Moreover, practitioners who work with children have a responsibility to maintain children's safety, promote children's wellness, and recognise concerns about the welfare of children (NSPCC learning, 2021).




Wellbeing




Seaman and Giles (2019) emphasise the positive effects of early childhood education experiences which may have on children's social and emotional growth as well as their chances of leading fulfilling lives. Early intervention has been demonstrated to help promote mental health and the knowledge has informed several of significant legislations that assist with early childhood education. In addition, Public Health England (2021) point out that a child's emotional and mental health have an impact on learning, cognitive development, physical, as well as social abilities. Encouraging the wellbeing of children helps with safety, development and successful transitions into adulthood.

Good relationships are indispensable to wellbeing. Comprehending the value of healthy relationships can help individuals identify ways in which these connections support the sense of identity and belonging. To promote mental health and emotional wellbeing, educators can assist children in developing coping mechanisms. This will also help children become more aware of mental health issues through adolescence (Hwb, 2022).

According to Cumming and Wong (2018) research and assessment should be done on the sociological, psychological, physiological, organisational science and philosophical perspectives on the welfare of early childhood educators. Characteristics of these sources are combined with Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory to make the case for a conception that is ethically grounded and recognises the mutual dependence of educator's wellbeing from the environments.

During the summer holidays, the Food and Fun programme seeks to encourage healthy living, happiness and involvement in education. Children that participate can gain better diets, more exercise, the chance to socialise and have fun with new people (Welsh Local Government Association, 2024a).

To promote children's wellbeing, the Henry Programme places a strong emphasis on forming bonds with parents, recognising strengths and working together. Families may improve their children's emotional health, confidence and healthy behaviours through the development of healthy connections. This will benefit the child's physical and mental health, academic success and overall quality of life (Henry, 2021).

To achieve healthy lifelong results, early education should provide the perfect environment for supporting and promoting personal, social and emotional development (Seaman and Giles, 2019). Furthermore, it is widely known that life quality and health are related. A person's experiences and how each situation compares to social norms and values are examples of both objective and subjective elements that contribute to wellbeing (Sfeatcu *et al.*, 2014).



Lifestyle

Lifestyles are described as socially associated behavioural patterns to health that are selected from numerous possibilities according to an individual's life situations (Cockerham 2007, cited in Mollborn *et al.*, 2014).

Mollborn *et al.* (2014) mention that children's health behaviours are associated with social disadvantages nevertheless, these correlations are frequently explained by socioeconomic disadvantage and reduced household resources. Early childhood health behaviours, even after adjusting for socioeconomic status and available home resources, predict children's development throughout school evaluations of cognition, behaviour, and health. Additionally, living a sedentary lifestyle and having inadequate physical health are two of the most prevalent harmful behaviours among children. This raises concerns of developing chronic illnesses namely diabetes, obesity and cardiovascular disease (Ługowska, Kolanowski and Trafialek, 2023). Therefore, lifestyle changes should be made for children and their families from birth to best promote health. This involves educating families about the advantages of a plant-based or whole-food based nutrition, regular physical activity, strong social bonds with peers and family as well as good rest practices for the entire family (Dalal *et al.*, 2022).

Barnardos (2024) claims that leading a healthy lifestyle is influenced by a variety of factors, including eating a balanced diet, practicing excellent hygiene, getting plenty of physical and mental exercise. Maintaining a healthy connection with food and drink plays a key role for both adults and children to lead balanced lives. Fostering positive behaviours in children from an early age will help empower children to make informed decisions during growth. Also, Chan and Hazan (2022) mentions that the Health Hexagon Model illustrates the fundamental components of a person's daily existence that should be encouraged, including restful sleep, a nutritious diet, frequent exercise, a close relationship with the environment, family and friends. These components have been acknowledged to reduce to their most basic form and passed down generation after generation. Public Health Wales (2024) also agrees that sleep is beneficial and a balanced diet with regular exercise, maintaining these key areas can help mental and the physical growth of children, as well as providing more energy after a good night's sleep.

According to Public Health Wales (2023) poverty and financial hardship can negatively damage children's immune systems, hearts, brains and respiratory systems by creating stress and changing early stress responses. Also, as healthier foods are typically more expensive and can be difficult for low-income families to afford, food insecurity which might raise a child's risk of obesity. Shonkoff *et al.* and Garner *et al.* (2012, cited in Francis *et al.*, 2018) agree that poverty and unhealthy living environments can create stress, which can raise the possibility of negative outcomes for children's physical, behavioural, emotional and cognitive health. Moreover, poverty limits children's potential and sets them up for poor health and life chances as adults. It is associated to unfavourable health, educational and social consequences (Wickham *et al.*, 2016).

Families and communities have an impact on children's health behaviours and this influence can be both positive and harmful for the children's healthy habits (Hagell *et al.*, 2018). Moreover, adults who lead healthy lifestyles and engage in physical activity can model these behaviours for their children and give them opportunities to follow suit (Blair *et al.*, 2010 cited in Wales Centre for Public Policy, 2022). However, as children frequently imitate the behaviour of the significant people in their lives, if the adults in their life participate in dangerous habits for example, smoking and binge drinking, it is possible that the children may follow suit (Wales Centre for Public Policy, 2022).

ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) refers to the accumulation of stressful, traumatic and harmful experiences during childhood such as, maltreatment, domestic violence and substance abuse. A child's health and wellbeing may be permanently impacted by these experiences, even into adulthood (Connecting Youth, Children and Adults, 2024).

Conclusion

In summary, wellbeing and health are related to one another and have an impact on each other. The physical, mental and emotional wellbeing are the characteristics of good health which help children form healthy habits at an early age. A child's health and wellbeing can be affected by several varied factors such as, family dynamics, financial situation and lifestyle decisions, among other factors. Promoting healthy behaviours including a balanced diet, consistent exercise and sound sleeping patterns is necessary, as it assists children and families with the recovery of traumatic situations. Furthermore, supporting children's social, mental and emotional growth can be aided by educators and other carers. Practitioners and caregivers should endeavour to create a better and more resilient society by realising the significance of childhood health and wellbeing.



Obesity within early years

This presentation will be focussing on childhood obesity and the effects of obesity. It will also consider the factors that contribute to obesity and the importance of having plans in place to fight obesity and health, to guarantee that children have a healthier future.

Kulshrestha and Bharti (2019) define obesity as the state of excessive fat accumulation in fat cells to the point that health may be compromised, there is evidence connecting genetic and environmental variables to childhood obesity. Childhood obesity is caused by several reasons, such as the consumption of energy-dense fast food, a decrease in the consumption of fruits and vegetables, a move to sedentary lifestyles without physical activity and excessive use of electronic media. Furthermore, age-based definitions are available from the World Health Organization outlines the definitions of obesity based on body mass index for children under Five, if the child is more than two standard deviations above the growth standard median, the child is considered overweight. If a person's body is more than three standard deviations over this median, they are considered obese.

West Glamorgan Safeguarding Board (2023) claims that Obesity is defined by the World Health Organisation as an excessive or abnormal fat buildup that is harmful to one's health. They have suggested that the prevention of childhood obesity should be given top priority since it has been acknowledged that it is among the biggest global public health concern in the twenty-first century. In Wales one in four children aged four to five arrive at school each year above average weight. The rates of childhood obesity are higher in less fortunate regions and severe childhood obesity is still increasing. Overweight infants are more likely to experience the onset of diseases like diabetes and cardiovascular illnesses earlier in life.

Akpara and Greene (2018) claim that when a child weighs more than the typical for the age group, it is said to be related to childhood obesity. Obesity is a serious public health concern which could affect happiness, self-esteem as well as physical health. Obesity is defined as a rise in body fat brought on by a diet high in calories and a low level of physical exercise. Childhood obesity could be because of the loss of happiness and self-worth. The parent of the children could improve the child's nutrition and exercise routine to avoid or reduce childhood obesity.

World Health Organizations (2016) claim that the rate of childhood obesity is alarmingly high in many nations and presents issues of concern. According to data from Wales Child Measurement Programme, twenty-six percent of infants aged four and five are overweight or obese (Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council, 2019).

Obesity in childhood has an immediate negative effect on children's health and is connected to an increased risk of multitude lifestyle diseases. Childhood obesity has negative psychosocial implications because it lowers life satisfaction and academic achievement and is accompanied by stigma, discrimination, and bullying. Obese children have a higher chance of becoming obese during adulthood (World Health Organization, 2024). Moreover, Childhood obesity has a damaging effect on the organ systems, it also contributes significantly to the rise in healthcare expenses. For all these reasons, preventing childhood obesity and identifying overweight and obese children at an early age is strongly encouraged to start treatment and help sustain a healthy weight (Güngör, 2014).

Eating too many calories and fats is commonly believed to be the cause of obesity. However, studies also point to larger serving sizes, excessive sugar content in drinks, and decreased physical activity as contributing factors. Childhood obesity can have detrimental impacts on children's physical and mental health as well as their social and emotional development. It is also linked to a child's reduced quality of life and subpar academic achievement. Obesity has increased due to easy access to unhealthy food and a reduction in physical activity brought on by a rise in energy-dense food consumption (Sahoo *et al.*, 2015). Furthermore, Erdem (2023) claims that obesity in children is associated with stress, worry, and low self-esteem.

The causes of obesity vary greatly and include behaviour, environment, genetics and culture. However, an energy imbalance caused by eating more energy from meals than children burn through exercise. Among other health benefits, children who exercise regularly tend to have stronger bones and muscles, are healthier and fitter, sleep better at night, and maintain a healthy weight (HM Government, 2016).

Beynon (2023) and Mohamed *et al.* (2022) both suggest that obesity also has significant consequences for long-term health and wellness. Obese children have a higher chance of developing non-communicable diseases as adults. Furthermore, children's self-esteem, social and emotional growth, and physical health are all impacted by childhood obesity. Also, a reduced quality of life and poor academic achievement is linked with obesity. Additionally, it has been suggested that children's ability to learn and participate in activities, especially play along with social contact, is restricted by obesity, both at home and at school.

Attempts to unravel the factors contributing to obesity remain, particularly those that could worsen or affect childhood obesity and its known and consistent detrimental effects on health. Obesity is still a difficult condition to successfully manage (Marks, 2022).

Technology has replaced many physical hobbies and workouts, children spend a lot of time on tablets, playing video games and watching television. When involved with these leisure activities, children stay still for hours on end. Reduced sleep and eating in front of a screen are two further factors that lead to the development of obesity (Tzenios, Salibi and Ekanayake, 2023).

Additionally, Increased evidence has been found linking obesity and lifestyle factors such as, media advertising, societal changes and family influences. To tackle the issue, medical practitioners should consider incorporating suitable screening into their practice (Khan *et al.*, 2021).

Robinson *et al.* (2017) suggests digital device usage increases the risk of obesity in children by increasing food consumption during viewing sessions, while also exposing children to higher calorie, low-nutrient food and drink advertisements which could shape children's desires and habits, while also shortening sleep cycles. Additionally, Screen-based content is rapidly replacing the time spent performing physical activities and children's screen time has increased dramatically globally, contributing to the promotion of obesity. Therefore, children should participate in vigorous intensity exercise three times a week and moderate to intense exercise for a minimum of one hour per day (Ghasemirad *et al.*, 2023).

Childhood obesity has shown to develop at the age of two, while also raising the possibility of maintaining an unhealthy weight throughout adulthood, which can have long-term detrimental impacts. Beyond genetic characteristics, obesity is known to be encouraged by unhealthy decisions about lifestyle, such as eating a diet high in calories and lacking in micronutrients and spending a lot of time in front of screens. On the other hand, it has been recognised that physical activity and a better diet help combat this (Lioret *et al.*, 2020).

Noonan (2018) suggest that obesity in children is associated with poor health throughout life. There is compelling evidence in the United Kingdom (UK) that there is an income gradient linked to childhood obesity, which means that children from lower-income households suffer an increased proportion of the disease's burden. The differences may be due to changes in lifestyle behaviours such as dietary habits. Studies within the UK indicate that eating healthful foods is typically more expensive than unhealthy consumable foods. As a result, compared to those with higher incomes, disadvantaged children have frequently lower-quality diets, such as consuming more fast food and fewer fruits and vegetables.

Wales has the highest rates of childhood obesity in the UK, due to this it has been raised as a public issue (National Assembly for Wales, no datea). Therefore, Welsh government (2018a) are placing efforts to prevent and lower obesity rates including more than just following nutrition guidelines. To put the foundation in place for a ten-year plan that will help to stop and eventually reduce obesity rates and raise the percentage of people who are a healthy weight.

Concerns over the increasing number of overweight and obese children and its effects on health and wellness have long existed, poor nutrition serves as a significantly higher contributing factor. Through offering a well-balanced diet, the food and drinks served in schools can encourage children and young adults to eat healthily (Welsh Local Government Association, 2024b).

Preventive measures such as a balanced diet, regular exercise, getting enough sleep and limiting screen time should be included into families and communities, ideally through organised programmes (Mohamed *et al.*, 2022).

Early mobility and motor skills should be encouraged in childcare facilities and families can be given access to a variety of healthy eating options. Early-life patterns of physical exercise and a healthy diet can shape habits that last for many years, Primary schools can provide age-appropriate education. Offering chances to acquire the information and abilities needed to lead a healthy lifestyle and support the normalisation of healthy food and physical activity throughout the school day (Welsh Government, 2019).

Childcare centres and other nurseries follow the government's dietary and health guidelines by making sure children have regular, wholesome meals in a social, enjoyable settings and free from outside distractions. During mealtimes, children should be watched, and staff members should try to eat with the children (Public Health Wales Observatory, no date). Moreover, practitioners have a responsibility to talk to pupils and their parents about obesity and health-related issues. Individuals should also provide advice on minor changes they can make and people in the community who can support them (National Assembly for Wales, no dateb).

The British Psychological Society (2019) claims that the early years of infancy hold particular significance for preventing obesity since this is the time when the biological and behavioural systems that regulate stress and appetite are most developed. Once obesity sets in, it can be challenging to treat, research indicates that a child's prenatal and early life nutrition strongly impacts the child's chance of being obese as an adult. Overweight in later childhood and adulthood is associated with obesity in early childhood, underscoring the significance of early intervention. Children from households with lower incomes are more likely to encounter nutrition-related challenges, which makes them more susceptible to gaining too much weight.

Kumari, Shukla, and Acharya (2022) mention that children who are overweight find it difficult to exercise. Children should therefore be encouraged to incorporate physical activity of any kind into their daily schedule. A parent's influence counts in assisting children in adjusting to a healthy environment, It is fundamental to evaluate whether the child's food and drink is the suggested diet is providing enough nutrients to support healthy living.

Within the school environment, I help children identify which food is healthy and unhealthy by questioning them, such as, is cake healthy or unhealthy? Also, by combining events with eating healthily for example, eating fruit and walking to school. The school offers a six-week program called pwysau plant yng nghymru (PIPYN) offered to parents to take part with their children to gain the knowledge needed to eat a healthy diet by offering meal planning, affordable food and healthy recipes. In addition to covering five topics Rhian reward, active Annie, Five-a-day Freddie, Polly and Percy portion size and Dylan drink water.

Conclusion

Based on the data from the World Health Organisations, childhood obesity is a serious growing issue. Genetics, environment, and behaviour, including prolonged sitting time and poor eating habits, have an impact on the children. Obesity raises the risk of non-communicable diseases and has direct health effects. In addition, it has a detrimental impact on psychosocial wellbeing, which includes life satisfaction and academic achievement. Stigma, discrimination, and bullying intensify this problem. To combat childhood obesity and enhance the children's general health and wellness, are fundamental to encourage physical exercise, good behaviours, and supportive settings to neutralise or decrease high obesity rates at young ages.

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