



FAST FOODS AND THE GROWING OBESITY IN YOUNG PEOPLE

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ABSTRACT

There is no doubt that there is a growing consumption of fast food, thanks to their growing numbers and popularity. Current environment is fast paced when nobody has time for anything. In the current times, both men and women are engaged in employment and the children go to school. This leaves with no time for the 'home maker' to attend to the chores of preparing food at home particularly the lunch. Many convenience stores and fast food joints have cropped to satisfy a felt need of the current mothers. There has been much criticism about the mushrooming growth off fast food joints and their patronizing by the younger people particularly the teenagers. While such fast food joints have found a good business opportunity, who will take the blame for the growing obesity among youngsters? This needs to be understood by parents and society at large. So, how can we stop this trend in obesity and make the youngsters more fit and fiddle. This is the topic of research for the current research, and the author hopes that this will help understanding the problem the connection between the two and finding creative solutions.

KEY WORDS

Concerns about the growing popularity, the obesity of younger people, and the mushrooming growth of fast food joints, the problem needs creative solution.

INTRODUCTION

There has been an exponential rise in the number of obese individuals especially in developed nations like United States and United Kingdom. Now obesity has become a public health

problem in most nations. Obesity is linked to several long term health conditions, premature death and illness including diabetes, heart disease, stroke, gall bladder disease, fatty liver, arthritis and joint disorders and some cancers. Studies have shown that this rise of obesity among the world population could be attributed to an increase in calorie intake coupled with lack of adequate physical activity. Obesity results from an imbalance between the amount of energy taken in, through eating and drinking, and the amount of energy spent on metabolism and physical activity. In children the energy is also spent in large parts in growth and development. The food choices affect energy intake and this interacts with the genetic and metabolic factors to finally determine the body weight and composition. Studies have shown that over the past four decades, consumption of food eaten away from home has also risen alarmingly. It is well known that eating out may lead to excess calorie intake and increases the risk of obesity because of large portion sizes and increased energy density of foods.

Fast food is associated with higher body mass index, less successful weight-loss maintenance and weight gain. Fast foods reduce the quality of diet and provide unhealthy choices especially among children and adolescents raising their risk of obesity. Fast foods affect children and youth often worse than adults. This is because most of the fast foods are targeted towards children and there is a sustained pattern of eating fast foods and eating out. Eating out is another major contributor to childhood obesity. Studies show that calorie content of out-of-home meals that children consumed was 55% higher than that of in-home meals.

In one of the research studies in USA, The prevalence of obesity increased consistently with frequenting fast-food restaurants, from 24% of those going less than once a week to 33% of those going 3 or more times per week. The predominant reason for choosing fast food was convenience. Although hypothetically 68% of adults who go to fast-food restaurants would choose healthier fast-food items when available, only 16% said they ever use nutritional information when ordering. The prevalence of fast-food consumption is high across education, income, and racial groups and is strongly associated with obesity. Making nutritional information at fast-food restaurants more readily available and easier to use may help consumers to order 2more healthful or lower calorie items.



Figure 1: Popularity of FF - Convenience

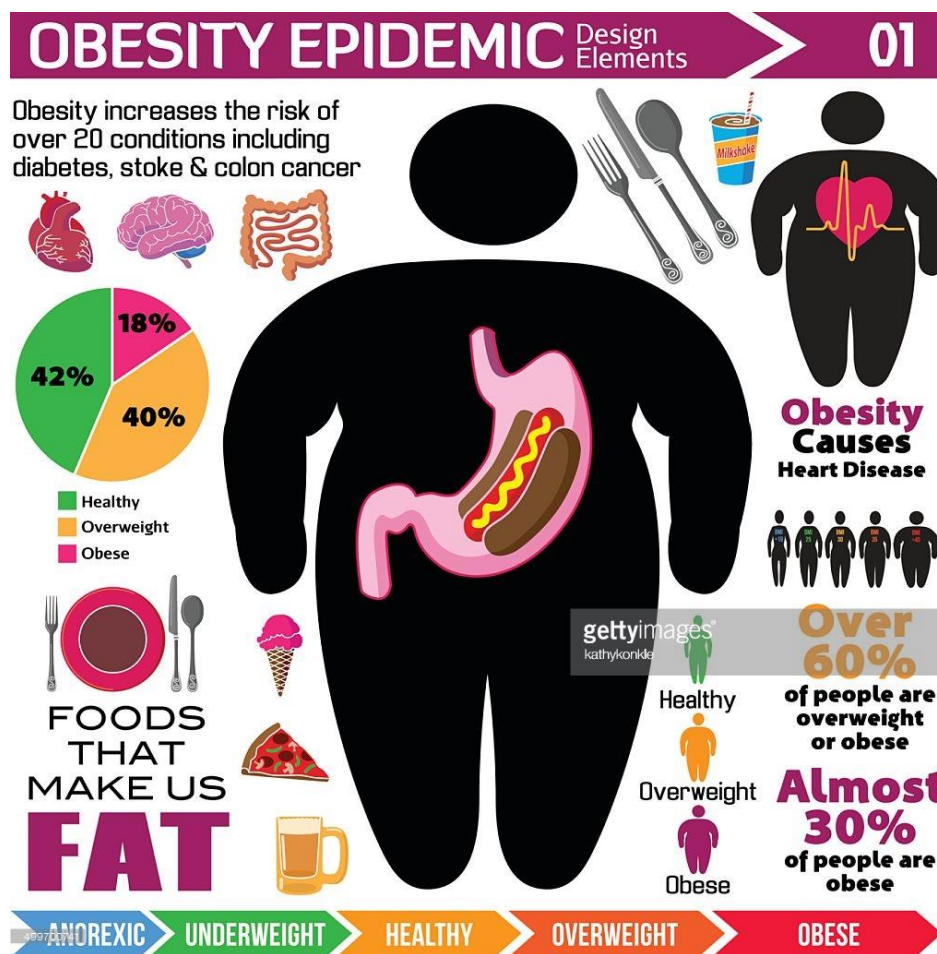


Figure 2: Epidemic proportion of Obesity

OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

In the introduction we have seen the growth of Obesity has affected the whole world and in particular the children. Obesity has taken the shape of an epidemic in the USA and is leading to major health complications such as premature deaths and illnesses like heart diseases, diabetes, fatty liver, arthritis, gall bladder diseases and joint disorders. You must have heard that one of the leading causes of obesity is junk food. Junk food and obesity are considered to go hand in hand. According to studies, the consumption of fast food has increased over the past four decades at an alarming rate. This increased calorie intake is a leading cause of obesity in the USA. If it is not controlled, health issues are going to rise in the coming years as more people will become obese eating unhealthy fast food. With these inputs in the background, it was decided to conduct a specific research with the following main Objectives:

1. A brief review of business and social environments leading to Obesity
2. Reasons for recent growth of Obesity in children and adults
3. Specific environmental and social factors contributing to the above
4. How obesity would affect on Organization performance.
5. How organizations cope with this development.
6. Findings, Conclusion and recommendations.

A lot of published data is available through magazines and periodicals and the electronic medium of web pages. So the need for a separate survey was not felt. But the enormity of research papers and published literature definitely through up several challenges. First it was necessary to identify literature suitable for the focused Objectives of the current research paper. Then collecting information, collating and summarizing etc took its time. Finally, it was found that adequate data was available through published sources. This was taken up for Analysis for arriving at the conclusions. The author is glad to say that qualitative research has been done I related areas and acknowledge the contribution of several research scholars and academicians. Though not found feasible to acknowledge individually, the author would like to express his gratitude for the past researchers for their contribution, and I am sure other research studies would follow.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Increase in calorie intake and inadequate physical activity are the leading causes of obesity. According to the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, the intake of calories in the US population is increasing every passing year. The numbers have risen alarmingly in the past decade. There are four basic reasons why fast food is linked to obesity. They are unhealthy ingredients, intake of larger portions, lower cost and Convenience factors. Most of the fast foods contain sugar, fats, carbohydrates and fewer amounts of vitamins and minerals. This means you consume unhealthy calories and particularly excess of sugar and fats which increase weight. Usually these foods are served in large proportions which further aggravate and increases weight; particularly since the 70s people are eating more junk food leading to weight gain. Fast foods are available at lower costs and become affordable to many people increasing consumption by lower income people. Fast food restaurants are available near your homes in convenient stores and get easily delivered to homes. In the last thirty years, obesity and those diseases related to obesity have skyrocketed in the United States. The number of overweight children in the age bracket of six to nineteen years old has tripled. Overweight adults rose from being half the population to two-thirds of the population. Over the course of this same period, the number of fast food restaurants have also doubled. Childhood obesity has reached epidemic proportions in developed as well as in developing countries. Overweight and obesity have significant impact on both physical and psychological health of children. Overweight and obese children are likely to into adulthood as obese and more likely to develop non-communicable diseases like diabetes and cardiovascular diseases at a younger age.

The development of obesity is not fully understood and it is believed to be a disorder with probably multiple causes. Environmental factors, lifestyle preferences, and cultural factors play key roles in the rise of obesity worldwide. In general, overweight and obesity are assumed to be the results of an increase in caloric and fat intake. On the other hand, there is supporting evidence to believe that excessive sugar intake of soft drink, increased portion size of foods, and steady decline in physical activity have been playing major roles in the rising rates of obesity all around the world. Childhood obesity can profoundly affect children's physical health, social, and emotional well-being, and self esteem. It is also associated with poor academic performance and a lower quality of life experienced by the child.

The growing burden of childhood obesity can be reduced, if society focuses on the causes. There are many components that form childhood obesity, some being more crucial than others. A combination of diet and physical activity intervention with the involvement of community and school management is more effective at preventing obesity or overweight. Moreover, if parents can enforce a healthier lifestyle at home, many obesity problems could be avoided. What children learn at home about eating healthy, exercising and making the right nutritional choices will eventually spill over into other aspects of their life. This will have the biggest influence on the choices kids make when selecting foods to consume at school and fast-food restaurants and be active. Focusing on these causes may, over time, decrease childhood obesity and lead to a healthier society as a whole.

Childhood obesity is a complex health issue. It occurs when a child is well above the normal or healthy weight for his or her age and height. The causes of excess weight gain in young people are similar to those in adults, including factors such as a person's behavior and genetics. Our nation's overall increase in obesity also is influenced by a person's community. Where people live can affect their ability to make healthy choices.



Figure 3: Inculcating healthy foods in children

Behaviors that influence weight gain include eating high-calorie, low-nutrient foods and beverages, not having enough physical exercise, sedentary habits such as watching television or other screen devices, self medication and sleeping at odd hours. In contrast, consuming a healthy diet and physical activity can help children grow as well as maintain a healthy weight gain in childhood. Balancing energy or calories consumed from foods and beverages with the calories burned through activity plays a role in preventing excess weight gain. In addition, eating healthy

and being physically active also has other health benefits and helps to prevent chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes, cancer, and heart disease.

The *Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans* recommends children aged 6 years or older do at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day. It can be difficult for children and parents to make healthy food choices and get enough physical activity when they are



Figure 4: Community Involvement

exposed to environments that do not support such healthy habits. Places such as child care centers, schools, or communities can affect diet and activity through the foods and drinks they offer and the opportunities for physical activity they provide. Other community factors that affect diet and physical activity include the affordability of healthy food options, peer and social supports, marketing and promotion, and policies that determine how a community is organized.

Consequences of Obesity for children now and hereafter

Obesity during childhood can have a harmful effect on the body in a variety of ways. Children who have obesity are more likely to have

- High blood pressure and high cholesterol, which are risk factors for cardiovascular disease (CVD).
- Increased risk of impaired glucose tolerance, insulin resistance, and type 2 diabetes.
- Breathing problems, such as asthma and sleep apnea.
- Joint problems and musculoskeletal discomfort.
- Fatty liver disease, gallstones, and gastro-esophageal reflux (i.e., heartburn).

Childhood obesity is also related to

- Psychological problems such as anxiety and depression.
- Low self-esteem and lower self-reported quality of life.
- Social problems such as bullying and stigma.
- Children who have obesity are more likely to become adults with obesity. Adult obesity is associated with increased risk of a number of serious health conditions including heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and cancer.
- If children have obesity, their obesity and disease risk factors in adulthood are likely to be more severe.

In a study conducted by the University of California at Berkeley, it was found that children who had easy access to places where fast food was sold were at increased risk for obesity. If a fast food restaurant was within a tenth of a mile from a school, the risk of obesity among ninth graders increased by 5.2 percent. With the number of obese adults in the United States expected to rise to 42% over the next twenty years, it is no wonder when USA spend over one hundred billion dollars per year on fast food.

Rising obesity rates impact fertility among young adults

Many adolescents and young adults may believe that obesity-related diseases, such as heart disease, diabetes and osteoarthritis, are concerns of old age. But excess weight can have detrimental effects on fertility, a consequence, younger adults may not recognize, until they want to start a family. Although age is the greatest predictor of fertility among women, obesity has a substantial effect on the likelihood of pregnancy. For example, the likelihood of pregnancy may be similar between a young woman with BMI greater than 30 kg/m² and a woman aged older than 35 years, according to Nanette Santoro, MD, the E. Stewart Taylor Endowed Chair in the department of obstetrics and gynecology and professor in the division of reproductive endocrinology at the University of Colorado Denver Anschutz Medical Campus.

Obesity has detrimental effects on pregnancy and child birth as per eminent doctors worldwide. According to Rhoda H Cobin, for a woman with a BMI of 35 kg/m², she has a 30% drop in her fertility by this obesity measure, There is a ‘dose-response’ relationship — the greater the

obesity, the more likely the infertility.” Obesity affects not only the probability of pregnancy in a given month but it also is associated with increased risk for spontaneous abortion, congenital anomalies, gestational diabetes and preeclampsia, according to a 2015 American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) Obesity in Pregnancy Practice Bulletin. Risk for stillbirth, although low, is increased by 30% for women with BMI 30 kg/m² to 34.9 kg/m² and almost doubles with BMI 40 kg/m² and higher, according to the bulletin.

Maternal obesity may also affect the long-term health of children, elevating their risks for metabolic syndrome and childhood obesity, according to ACOG. However, separating prenatal effects from influences after birth is difficult. Obesity is not a concern only for women; men with obesity may also have decreased fertility. “We tend to think of this as a women’s issue, but it actually takes two people to make a baby,” Rhoda H. Cobin, MD, clinical professor of medicine in the division of medicine, endocrinology and bone disease at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai School, told *Endocrine Today*. “Obesity affects men’s fertility as well as women’s fertility, so when people talk about infertility, they’re really talking about a couple.”

Studies on Obesity among Indian population age wise has shown that the incidence of Obesity and consequences of health are high among adult population which is growing at a faster rate as indicated in the figure 5 below:

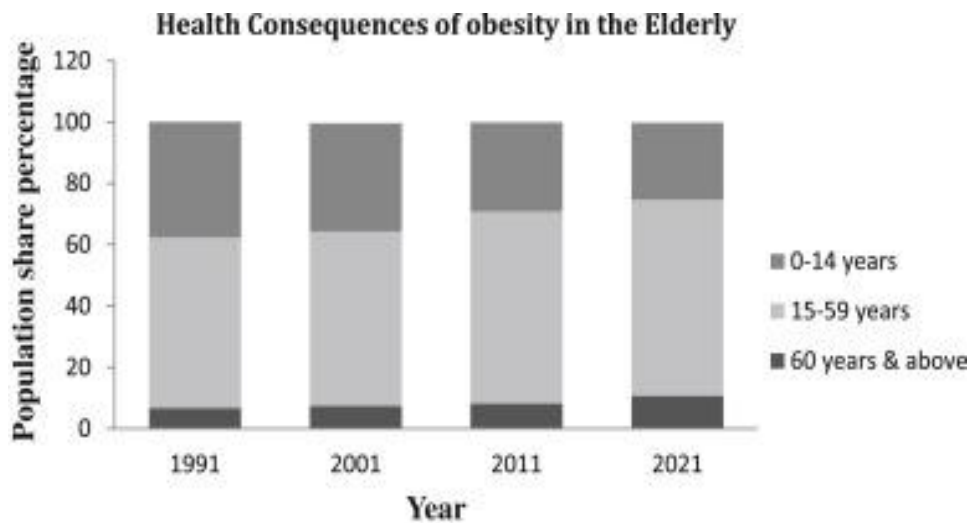


Figure 5: Population structure in India 1991-2021

It can be seen from the statistical figures, above, that proportion of population in India in the age group of 15 – 59 will increase between 1991 and 2021. It is a matter of concern that younger population which consists of children and younger teenagers are getting reduced. This is perhaps traced to the growth of Obesity among youngsters and reduction in their fertility. Contributory Factors of Obesity has been analyzed in Figure 6. The Physiological factors and the Environmental factors have been considered for assessing their impact on obesity. Most of the Physiological factors have been traced to increased energy intake of foods and medicines/vitamin supplements for normalizing metabolic function. But unfortunately an over doze of supplements are prescribed and consumed and this contributes directly to obesity.

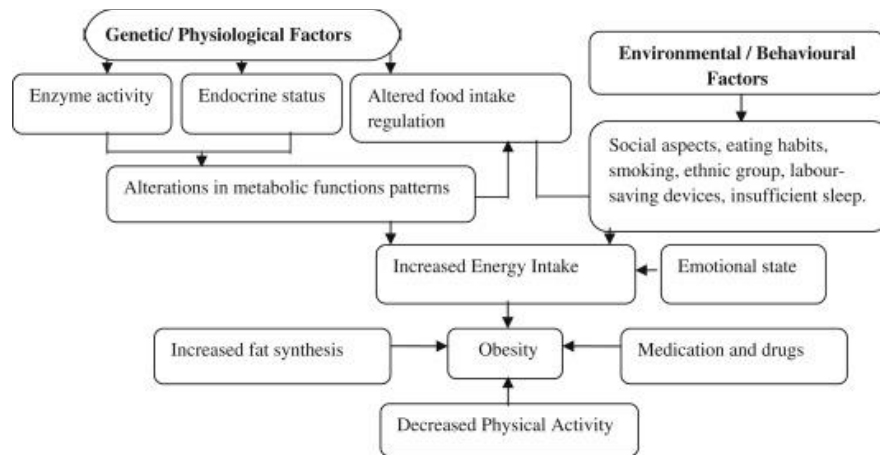


Figure 6: Contributory Factors of Obesity

Environmental factors include social and peer groups, chatting and electronic devices used for communication, and other external factors. The first factor is generally addressed by increased fat consumption and the second factor through medication. The prescription should not be allowed to become worse than the causes.

Classification	BMI	Risk of co-morbidities
Underweight	<18.5	Low
Normal range	18.5–24.9	Average
Overweight	25.0–29.9	Increased
Obese class I	30.0–34.9	Moderate
Obese class II	35.0–39.9	Severe
Obese class III	≥40	Very severe

TABLE 1 Classification of Obesity with BMI

IMPACT OF OBESITY IN INDUSTRY EMPLOYEES

Absenteeism, inconsistent performance and a general lack of commitment are evident in workers suffering from obesity and increasing and uncontrollable weight. Organizational intervention programs aim to reduce this and help workers to lead a normal life. The worst effect of obesity in workers is a loss of self esteem that takes a lot of effort to correct, which also impacts his family life and social recognition.



Figure 7: Education and Exercise Training

So, the workplace is ideal for implementing interventions to reduce obesity and cardio metabolic risk factors in working people. Although workers' health promotion is not new, employer-sponsored wellness programs have become more widespread due to the rising number and high cost of obesity. Over the past two decades, employers and researchers focused efforts on individual-based programs to change employees' nutrition and exercise behaviors, but more recently, the workplace environment has been targeted. Overall, there is good evidence that individual-based workplace programs can result in modest weight loss, the evidence for effects on other risk factors on long-term health and costs is not consistent. There is less evidence on the benefit of environmental-based interventions, and more data will be needed to establish conclusions about the benefits of these types of interventions. A major challenge for employers and researchers in the future will be to find the balance between effectiveness and economic viability of workplace wellness programs.

As workplace interventions to reduce obesity and cardio metabolic risk are becoming more widespread, it is critical to evaluate the effectiveness of different types of programs. Although the quality of published studies is somewhat inconclusive, systematic reviews of individual-based behavioral interventions have demonstrated a consistent finding of moderate weight loss, but the data to support reduction of other cardio metabolic risk factors is inconsistent. Although studies of environmental interventions have several limitations, early results suggest that these interventions may have a significant effect on weight and nutrition and physical activity behaviors.

Though effective size of workplace interventions is small when considered on an individual basis, but when these results are applied across large populations of workers, the potential impact is much larger. Programs that intervene at multiple levels (host, vector, and environment) are most likely to produce lasting impact on workers' health. A major challenge for employers will be finding the balance between effectiveness and economic viability of worksite programs. Future research of worksite interventions must evaluate both short-term and long-term health and cost-effectiveness outcomes.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INFERENCE

The review of Literature has been elaborate, and it gives comprehensive data on Obesity, its causes and how it can be averted. Business environment today, is to say the least, very competitive and it is due to these pressures many of the organization problems have cropped up. The nature of the competitive pressure is such that it leaves no time for employee and employer to think about certain problems at leisure to find creative solutions. Obesity in the organization is one such problem. This is a hush – hush murmuring which needs trained ears, to hear and solve. Human Resources department has to identify the causes and solve this organizational problem through creative intervention programs.

The reasons for the sporadic growth of obesity and related problems have been traced in the section for review of Literature. We cannot escape from the fact that the so called junk food i.e. fast foods delivered from the nearby local food outlet is one of the leading causes. Because of the present day life style, children and parents in the family, workers in their factories and workplaces do not have the time to identify the correct food suitable for them and so, they rush to the nearby fast food outlets and grab what is available in the limited time at their disposal. This often results in consumption of unhealthy foods which add fat and not much nutrition to your body. Cooking of food at home is also reduced due to the non availability of the home maker at home for these chores.

Because both the parents have to work in the circumstances today, to give a better education to their children, it leaves very little time for packing a lunch box and even having a meaningful conversation on what is happening at the school. These social factors and the need to work to earn the wages for sustaining a standard of living act as pressures. Because of these pressures parents, who are also members of organizations, do not get adequate rest for thinking and acting on what is best for their families. They also join the rat race to find one day that they have also become victims of the new disease called OBESITY and throw up their hands. This becomes a social and environmental issue in which the fast food joints do not join hands till their children and family members are affected. The solution lies in first recognizing the magnitude of the problem and attempt to solve it.

Organizations also need to deal with this problem because in the long run they are left with unhealthy and obese employees because they have also become victims of the local fast food

joints. Fast food joints will not take up responsibility for such developments because it is their bread and butter. Then where is the solution? Organizations can provide healthy food in the form of breakfast and lunch to their employees; but it needs a lot of courage and sacrifice and understanding. The impact and effectiveness of such decisions take time to register and organizations need to be patient.

Many organizations today, are quite seized off this problem and are trying to solve by executive and employee health and training program. Unless the root cause is identified and tackled, the results may not be encouraging. Training and Development departments are possessed of this situation and doing a lot for improving the employee health and welfare through counseling in person or web counseling.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATION

Obesity is real and it is growing. There is an urgent need to first recognize this and act responsibly thereafter. In the data analysis section we have seen inescapable conclusion that obesity is a growing reality and it needs to be tackled at global, organizational and household levels. It is a great concern today, particularly with the development of mobile and other technologies which help transfer of data instantaneously over long distances and people. One of the chief causes identified in this generation of people is the sedentary habits, thanks to instant availability of anything and everything at the click of a mouse or the press of a mobile button. Above all, is the concern on the impact of reproductive health of youngsters which is a long term concern and needs to be addressed immediately through training and policy intervention.

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