

Commentary Article

An Upstream Approach to Tackle Childhood Obesity in India!

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ABSTRACT

Till date, the approach of the Indian government towards tackling childhood obesity has been tilted more towards midstream and downstream i.e. lifestyle based; prioritizing on bringing about behavioral changes through persuasion and clinical intervention

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An upstream approach to tackle childhood obesity in India!

India has the second highest number of obese children in the world¹ and it will have over 17 million children with excess weight by 2025². Till date, the approach of the Indian government towards tackling childhood obesity has been tilted more towards midstream and downstream i.e. lifestyle based; prioritizing on bringing about behavioral changes through persuasion and clinical intervention. A study on Effectiveness of the Healthy Lifestyles Programme (HeLP) to prevent obesity in UK primary-school children was published in the Lancet Child & Adolescent health, which suggested that a focus on upstream determinants of obesity and whole-system based approach can be effective in tackling the childhood obesity rather than HeLP intervention³. It's high time that the Indian government must lay a greater emphasis on tackling upstream determinants of obesity through socio-ecological approach as designed by WHO⁴. Indian government must come up with hard policy measures like taxing salty and unhealthy foods and promoting nutritious food through subsidies. Food system may be targeted at all levels from agricultural, food processing, food distribution, marketing, to retail to ensure that healthy food supply reaches the children. The products sold in the schools are to be strictly regulated and children should be restricted from eating junk food. This can be done by decreasing the density of fast food outlets near school premises. Bringing about infrastructural changes like promoting community gardens, cycling tracks, compulsory usage of public transport to travel to the school, involving the children in the community and environmental protection activities can help them perform physically. In India fat child is perceived as a healthy and cute child! Hence making the

anti-obesity practice a social norm is the need of the hour. To achieve this, stakeholder-based approach which coordinates and engages all the stakeholders like parents, corporates, schools, educators, doctors, food traders etc. to bring about collaborative changes to the environment and society in which children dwell is the only way out. Regulation and environmental changes are more productive than health promotion and social marketing. Health care providers must come up with an effective obesity management plan which comprehensively addresses the factors present in the obesogenic environment affecting the children. Policy actions must be framed and implemented which target the underlying determinants of childhood obesity.

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