

EARLY CHILDHOOD MATTERS

Assessment 2

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Part 1

The most important health concerns in Australia is childhood obesity, which has a big impact on ECEC settings as well as general public health. According to Zhao and Roberts (2024), early childhood education and care is referred to as "ECEC." The importance of early childhood education and care (ECEC) in combating childhood obesity has come to light more and more recently (Grady et al. 2024.p.100122). Furthermore, parents and educators find it difficult to encourage a healthy diet (Simpson et al. 2023.p. 102464). Also [cecq.gov.au](https://www.cecq.gov.au) (2024) has set some National quality guidelines in this context. With a focus on the roles of parents, educators, and modern interventions like the Brighter Beginnings Developmental screening programme, Part A attempts to examine and assess various viewpoints on childhood obesity within the Australian setting.

Parental Perspectives and Challenges

As per Robinson & Sutin, (2017), adolescent obesity is extremely common worldwide. While it is often believed that parents' recognition of their kids as overweight has become an essential prerequisite for addressing obesity in children, new research indicates that this identification is paradoxically linked to higher childhood weight growth. It is possible that when parents label their overweight kid, the child starts to feel self-conscious about their size and tries to shed pounds, which ultimately leads to weight gain.

Interviews were conducted with 18 children (with a mean age: 10 years) as well as 24 parents. By engaging in physical activity or eating a healthy diet, the respondents anticipated losing weight by the study of Schalkwijk et al. (2015). In addition to the lack of support from their families, parents found it difficult to implement and follow new restrictions. Children suffered from inconsistent guidance and parental disinterest. The children's capacity to make the required adjustments was hampered by bullying they faced in the classroom. On the contrary, support from others accelerated their development. Parents pointed out that the general practitioner needed to demonstrate interest in the weight loss programme as well as discuss being overweight in a harmless manner.

Role of educators and teachers in this context

The educators play a significant role in shaping the attitudes and behaviors of the children towards food and nutrition in ECEC settings (Ba Akhlagh & Leggett, 2023.p.12). Strategies to improve teacher wellness have to be the first priority in any endeavour to advance the well-being of students. Prioritising continuing education that tackles occupational health issues for teachers is crucial. These chances must be attentive and give special consideration to the requirements of the instructors in each school if they are to have any real value. Therefore, it is crucial to regularly analyse teachers' health beliefs, views, as well as expertise in order to comprehend how their demands are developing. Professional growth programmes that are designed with teachers in mind and jointly developed with their input might then be informed by these assessments. Investing explicitly in the health of teachers is putting money in the health of the entire school.

Part 2

I have been working as a teacher in the Australian early childhood education and care sector. Referring to my experience, childhood obesity is a significant issue that I encounter in my professional practice regularly. I have come to know that childhood obesity severely impacts the physical health and well-being of children. As per my understanding, childhood obesity affects the social, emotional, and cognitive development of children to a great extent.

I believe that it is essential to address childhood obesity as early as possible. Even, it is essential to promote mass awareness about the fatal impact of childhood obesity and its prolonged impact in causing health hazards in the later phases of life. The same will eventually contribute to controlling unhealthy eating among the children. In other words, the same can significantly shape positive outcomes for children's health and development. Based on the information available at secondary sources, it has been identified that obese children are at increased risk of developing various health problems including cardiovascular diseases, type 2 diabetes, and mental health issues (Simpson et al. 2023.p. 102464). It is my responsibility as a teacher to help them to develop lifelong habits of physical activity and healthy eating.

It has been identified that childhood obesity is interconnected with broader societal issues such as inadequacy of nutritious food than an estimated requirement, socio-economic disparities etc (Grady et al. 2024.p.100122). In my role as a teacher, I advocate for social justice and equity by creating inclusive familiar environments where all children can have access to nutritious meals (i.e. balanced diet) and opportunities for physical activity. I work closely with the families of the children in order to understand their dietary preferences. As a teacher, I encourage them to follow healthier nutritious food choices.

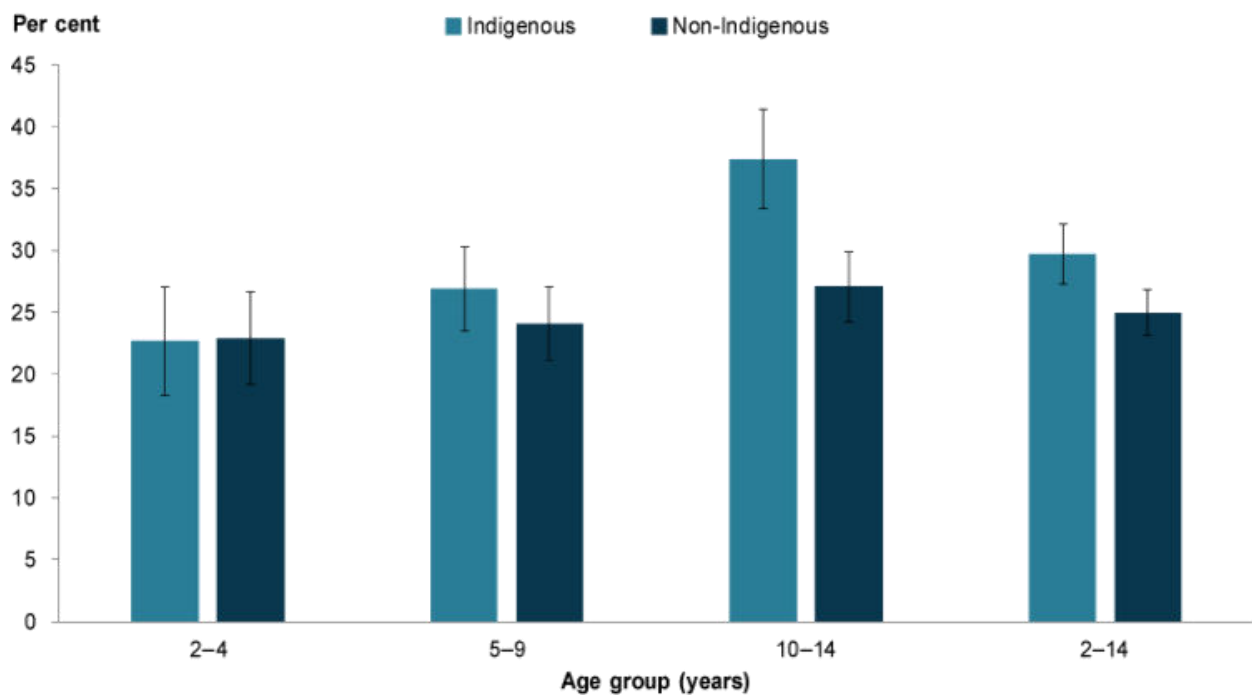


Figure: Child obesity

(Source: aihw.gov.au, 2022)

According to the information available at secondary sources, “childhood obesity” can be handled by ensuring collective support from the families, communities, and other stakeholders (Goldfeld et al. 2021.p.1050). I emphasize on the significance of parental involvement and support in promoting healthy habits at home during my interactions with families. I engage with nutritionists, healthcare professionals, and various community organizations in order to access relevant resources and necessary expertise. I hope the same can shape my practice as a teacher to some extent and eventually can support children's health and well-being.

As a teacher, I focus on empowering children to develop a healthy relationship with their bodies. In my opinion, the same eventually enhances their self-confidence over the period. Referring to my understanding, childhood obesity is a critical and multifaceted issue. As a teacher, I have observed many children with obesity when working in the Australian early childhood education and care sector. Obesity in childhood vehemently affects physical health and also interrupts the emotional, social, and cultural dimensions of child development. I aim to contribute to the well-being of the children and their families in my care along with addressing relevant societal challenges related to childhood obesity.

Part 3

News reports around the country announce what teachers have witnessed first hand over the past twenty years: students in the US are growing larger and heavier. This issue of the Independent has supplementary pieces that discuss the detrimental effects of this development on the physical well-being and self-worth of our country's youth as well as the financial strain that the growing problem of obesity is putting on our healthcare system (aihw.gov.au, 2024). The primary factor contributing to the rise in childhood and teenage obesity is simple: an imbalance between caloric intake as well as expenditure. Stated differently, the youth are choosing unhealthy foods and not engaging in enough movement. Moreover, overweight kids and teens have a higher chance of growing up to be obese or overweight grownups. Even though about 25% of adult obesity is the result of childhood obesity, obese people that were overweight as youngsters have a much greater likelihood of obesity than persons who develop obesity while adults (cdc.gov . 2021). Obesity in older people is linked to higher risks of coronary artery disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, early death, multiple cancers, cartilage degeneration, as well as numerous other medical conditions. I have a strong commitment to fulfilling my duties as a teacher in the Australian early childhood education and care system. I have learned a great deal about childhood obesity throughout this time. Furthermore, I now have a comprehensive grasp of how childhood obesity affects kids, families, and society at large.

The Spectrum of Opportunities Framework for State-Level Obesity Prevention Efforts Targeting the Early Care and Education Setting



Figure: Role of teachers in case of obesity

(Source: cdc.gov, 2024)

Children from low-income families are far more likely to suffer from obesity. As a teacher, I am aware of how important early childhood education and care environments

are in reducing childhood obesity and encouraging healthy lifestyle choices. Secondary sources have provided confirmation that ECEC programmes can impact children's dietary habits and physical activity levels by creating supportive environments (Lum et al., 2023, p. 102455). I have often observed that parents are allowing their child to eat in McDonalds as it is a cheap option but they never think that the refined products are too harmful. Also the flour, fried meals, ready to eat meals are harmful for the children as well as any individual. Additionally, the goal of well-designed ECEC programmes is to educate the family members on the value of maintaining a healthy diet. The importance of including physical exercise and evidence-based nutrition instruction in the curriculum in the context of forming lifetime healthy habits is also reflected in this.

Many weight-related disorders that were previously only seen in adults have been discovered in younger people more frequently in recent years. For instance, diabetes of type 2 was virtually nonexistent in young adults ten years ago, whereas in certain neighbourhoods now, it accounts for approximately half of all new occurrences of diabetes in children and adolescents. Among young people who are overweight, approximately 61% possess at least one extra heart disease risk variable, such as elevated blood pressure or diabetes (cdc.gov .2021). Being overweight as a child is also linked to social as well as psychological issues like prejudice and low self-esteem.

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