ABSTRACT

TITLE: The association of caregivers’ educational level and their knowledge of children’s nutrition and exercise behavior

BACKGROUND: Parents play an instrumental role in modeling their children’s health behaviors and exposing them to new foods, and engaging them in physical activities.

OBJECTIVE: To assess the association of parents’ educational level on their nutritional and physical activity knowledge.

METHODS: This is a cross-sectional study of 72 participants from a nutrition and wellness program targeting parents of African American preschoolers. Socio-demographic, child’s nutritional and physical exercise habit survey and anthropometric data were collected from all participants at baseline.

RESULTS: 77% of the participants were grandmothers or mothers; the mean age was 44.8 and 13% of participants were college graduates. 66% were obese. The mean BMI was 33 kg/m². 89% of the participants reported that their children exercise at least once a week. 51% of the participants’ children drank soda or sweetened beverages at least once a week. LODS: Grandmothers/Mothers

CONCLUSIONS: Larger sample size and longer time evaluation are needed to assess the association and impact of maternal education on parents’ knowledge of physical activity and nutrition and their children’s behavior.

BACKGROUND

The prevalence of obesity among U.S. children age 2-19 is 17%. Obesity among black children is disproportionately higher than their white counterparts. Obesity is affected by physical and social exposure during childhood, adolescence, young adulthood and late adult life.

Among the many proven determinants of childhood obesity is the parental influence and home environment.

Parents are instrumental in exposing children to certain foods, engaging them in physical activities and modeling other behaviors that contribute to energy balance and diet composition.

Educational level and nutritional knowledge of parents also play a major role in childhood obesity.

Several studies have demonstrated the positive association between nutritional knowledge of parents and the consequent nutritional behavior and physical activity habits.

OBJECTIVE

To assess the association of parents’ educational level on their nutritional and physical activity knowledge.

RESULTS

72 participants were enrolled in the FitFamily Jr. program. 77% of the participants were mothers or grandmothers. The mean age of parents or guardians was 44.8 years and under living in a low-income neighborhood of Washington, DC were eligible.

The mean BMI was 33 kg/m². 84% of the participants were overweight or obese.

The mean scores for nutrition and physical activity knowledge were 41% and 50%, respectively. 89% of the participants reported that their children exercised at least once a week. 51% of the participants’ children drank soda or sweetened beverages. Mothers’ educational level was significantly associated with nutritional knowledge (p = 0.01).

All statistical tests were two-tailed and a p-value <0.05 was considered statistically significant.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

Mothers’ educational level was significantly associated with nutritional knowledge.

Higher scores on nutrition and activity knowledge did not translate into healthy behaviors for the participants children.

This could be due to confounding factors such as low socio-economic status, lack of access to fresh produce and safe play areas.

A high percentage of the participants were overweight or obese. Unhealthy behaviors among the caregivers may contribute to the high rates of obesity and overweight and in turn might influence the children’s nutritional and activity behaviors.

Since the nutrition and physical activity behaviors were self-reported, there may have been social desirability bias which may have contributed to homogeneity of the study population.

Larger sample size and longer time evaluation are needed to assess the association and impact of maternal education on parents’ knowledge of physical activity and nutrition and their children’s behavior.

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REFERENCES

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