HOW DOES POVERTY IMPACT CHILDHOOD OBESITY? A SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH AND IMPLICATIONS FOR CLINICAL PRACTICE

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Objectives

1) Participants will be able to discuss how poverty impacts children’s ability to maintain a healthy body weight

2) Participants will be able to identify resources for helping children overcome poverty-related barriers to a healthy body weight

3) Participants will be able to formulate at least one professional practice goal to help children in their clinical population affected by poverty maintain a healthy body weight

Poverty and Obesity: Review of the Literature
Poverty

Poverty
- $16,240 per year for a family of two
- $24,600 per year for a family of four

Low income:
- $32,480 per year for a family of two
- $49,200 for a family of four
- Amount families need to afford basic expenses

43% of children live in low income households = 30 million children
Poverty and Obesity

Odds of Childhood Obesity by Household Income (% of Federal Poverty Level)

- 3.17
- 2.17
- 1.78
- 1.00

Poverty and Obesity

- **Household-level poverty**: inability to afford healthy foods or pay-to-play sports leagues, increased family stress

- **Neighborhood-level poverty**: lack of well-maintained parks, food swamps/food deserts, fewer healthcare providers (especially specialists)
Poverty and Obesity

Most research focuses on household-level poverty, but there likely exists a relationship between neighborhood-level poverty and obesity too.

- Above and beyond household-level poverty
- Varies by gender and race/ethnicity

Poverty and Obesity: Ongoing Research
Poverty and Obesity Study

To examine the impact of migrating to a higher or lower poverty neighborhood on BMI trajectory using:

- Novel independent variable - migrating to a higher or lower poverty neighborhood
- Novel analytic approach - propensity score methods
- Novel data – data from New York City school system (largest school system in the nation), 10 years of longitudinal BMI measures

Poverty and Obesity Study

Retrospective analysis of secondary data

NewCourtland Center for Transitions & Health

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Geocoding Home Address via NYC School Data

NYC Neighborhood Tabulation Area Data

Census Tract Level Federal Poverty Data

Neighborhood Poverty for Each Child

Moved from low to high poverty neighborhood

Moved from high to low poverty neighborhood

Propensity Score Matching

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2006

2016
Case Study

• You work at a busy endocrinology practice in Nurseville, Florida. You care for many children who meet criteria for obesity. You always provide them with health behavior education about a nutritious diet and increasing physical activity, but you know that social determinants of health (such as poverty) directly impact ability to engage in healthy behaviors. You wonder “What can I do to help address social determinants of health for the children with obesity in my clinical practice?”
Implications for Clinical Practice

Consider screening for challenges related to poverty and other social determinants of health

- Multiple examples of screening tools in published research
  - Hunger Vital Sign: 2 question screener for food insecurity
  - Income, Housing, Education, Legal Status, Literacy, and Person safety survey (IHELLP): 11 questions

- Considerations
  - Screen all families
  - Sensitive and empathetic, not judgmental

Implications for Clinical Practice

Connect families with relevant resources

- Know your community resources

- Learn about federal resources
  - Benefits.gov, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), National School Lunch Program, Children’s Health Insurance Program, National Immigration Law Center, State Unemployment Insurance Benefit

- Create a resource referral template
  - American Academy of Pediatrics - free template online
Implications for Clinical Practice

Gain clinical competency in addressing challenges related to poverty and social determinants of health

- American Academy of Pediatrics Curriculum on US Child Poverty
- American Nurses Association Resources on Diversity Awareness
- Food Research & Action Center Toolkit on Addressing Food Insecurity

Implications for Clinical Practice

Recognize what you can and cannot do

- Partner with other members of the healthcare team (social workers, community health workers, patient navigators)
  - Task sharing
  - Complementary roles
- Consider how attention to social determinants of health are integral to improving clinical outcomes
- Address root causes via advocacy
  - Letters to the Editor in local newspaper
  - Civic engagement and volunteering
  - Professional organization’s policy arm
    - American Nurses Association Advocacy Toolkit
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Resources

- SNAP: https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/apply
- WIC: https://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/who-how-apply
- Children’s Health Insurance Program: https://www.insurekidsnow.gov/
- National Immigration Law Center: https://www.nilc.org/

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Thank You

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