

Strategies for Promoting Healthy Lifestyles in Families

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Abstract

This paper establishes the connection between lifestyle and family living as well as proposes some of the strategies for improving healthy life in every home. This exposition is done under critical analysis of the factors affecting lifestyle including but not limited to the following parent's working lifestyle, parent's social lifestyle, family feeding habits and environmental practices. Also, the paper examined some of the challenges to healthy lifestyles in families which include family cultural background, poor feeding habit, lack of quality time spent together as a family and influence of technology and mass media. Conclusions were reached that healthy lifestyle promotes healthy family living once necessary precautions are taken based on established standard as discussed in the paper. Based on these conclusions, it was recommended that families should improve on their concerns for health and well being, need for greater awareness and components of health and wellness should be highlighted on a greater scale in all the levels of schooling, from the primary to the tertiary institutions.

Key Words: Family, Lifestyle, Health, Parenting, Environmental practices and food habits.

Introduction

Lifestyle is the habit, attitude, tastes, moral standards, and economic level that together constitute the mode of living of an individual or group. Lifestyle can also be defined as a way of living of individuals, families (households), and societies, which may manifest in coping with their physical, psychological, social, and economic

environments on a day-to-day basis. The concept is expressed in both work and leisure behavior patterns and in activities, attitudes, interests, opinions, values, and allocation of income (Usoroh and Ekpu, 2011). It also reflects people's self concept, perception and beliefs, especially as seen by other people.

It is an established fact that parental practices and styles have a direct impact on personal and family lifestyle. According to Kembe, (2005), the family is the most important group in which parents provide children with different types of stimulating interactions for child upbringing. Good upbringing is all about training a child to be a good citizen and an asset to society. Mgboro in Igba and Igba (2010) stated that if parents care enough to inculcate in their children the virtues of discipline, honesty, hard work, and Godly living, there will be minimal cases of corruption in Nigeria. The individual and family lifestyle or behaviour can influence his state of health and on the other hand, individual state of health can influence lifestyle choices. Thus, families that adopt healthy lifestyles can build and develop positive behaviors and good self-concept.

Healthy lifestyles consist of good nutrition and good feeding habit, Observance good sanitation practices and safety habit, regular exercise, non-smoking, non-alcohol consumption, safe drug use, avoidance of casual and unprotected sex and upholding positive traditional values.

In the recent past, there is gradual disintegration of the family system. This seemingly trend has given rise to unhealthy lifestyles which has manifested into anti- social behavior that are impediment to National cohesion and development. According to Okafor,(2005) and Igbo, (2005), drug and alcohol abuse, violence and delinquent behavior, lack of respect for elders and human life, casual and

unprotected sex, internet influence (face book, twitters,)), rape, kidnapping and poor eating habits are some of these behaviors that are worrisome to families and the society in general.

There are many parenting theories which have been developed to improve a healthy family life when adopted by families. One among them is "parenting theory" by Dobson . His theory stressed on the importance of unconditional love among the family members. Like many authors from the 1970s and '80s, he believes that there are three broad strands of parent style: (1) The authoritarian: Where children's wishes are not consulted and parents expect them to do without discussion. (2) The authoritative: Parents and children listen to each other, and the parents offer firm guidelines and boundaries, but with flexibility. (3) The permissive: Where children do as they like and the parents don't take much notice). He proposes that the authoritative style is the healthiest. Furthermore, Okorodudu, (2010) stated that the most unhappy and anti-social teens and adults come from extremely permissive homes, followed by those from strict authoritarian homes.

This paper therefore focuses on:

1. Relationship between lifestyle and family living.
2. Challenges of achieving positive and healthy lifestyles in family.
3. Ways of promoting positive lifestyle in family.

Relationship between lifestyle and family living

In general, there is a close relationship between family living and lifestyle. According to Okafor (2005) those lifestyles which are essential for increasing quality and years of life of individuals are healthy while, those negative health behaviours that have been scientifically proven to be harmful to one's health are the unhealthy lifestyle. Lifestyles are behaviour of choice, which affect ones health status (Adaramju, Adenubi, & Nwabueze, 2010). These ranges from smoking, poor feeding habit, inactivity, alcoholism, drug abuse, poor sanitation practices and participation in unprotected sexual relationship.

Adaramju *et al.* (2010) are of the opinion that individuals with healthy lifestyles tend to live longer than those with unhealthy lifestyle.

Lifestyle and health cannot be discussed in isolation without the parameters amongst several other factors that determine lifestyle whether healthy and unhealthy. Some of these determinants are not limited to only the following, but for the purpose of this discourse, the following considerations are made:

- a. Parental work.
- b. Social lifestyle.
- c. Family feeding habit.
- d. Family health practices.

Parental work

The contemporary family is faced with a busy lifestyle. The input from the father cannot satisfy all the needs of the family. As a result, both parents engage themselves in work outside the home.

Kalango in Nwankwo (2005) reported that the number of women taking employment outside the home have increased rapidly. The new trend where some parents stay far from home for a long period ranging from two weeks to one month seems to be a socio-economic evolution which has influenced parent child-interaction and relationship negatively. The consequence of the above situation is that children's moral and social developments are influenced negatively since the child may learn from house helps, peer group, pornography books and internet. In this situation, parents are no longer acting as a role model. Moreover, Achalu, (2004) pointed out that the absence of parents especially the mothers can lead to family problems such as child abuse and neglect, broken homes and lower academic performance of the children and in extreme cases school dropouts, truancy and indiscipline among youths.

Studies of Hoffman in Udchukwu (2006) revealed that children with employed parents show more negative effect in conduct behaviour and exhibits all sorts of anti-social behaviors such as robbery, dishonesty, examination misconduct, drug abuse, smoking, illegal sexual activities and other juvenile delinquencies in society. These parents are also categorized as absentee parents who spend long hours of the day at work, come home when the children are at bed and leave for work when they children are still sleeping. Parent-child interaction and relationship is at the barest minimum in such families and with this scenario,

children may engage in all sorts of anti-social behavior.

Moreover, the challenges of dual career parents may lead to stress and conflict, (Ima-Osagie 1994). Thus, economic hardship undermines parenting and has affected the family structure and lifestyle. Women have deviated from the traditional roles to seek education, occupation, and remunerated work to establish some degree of economic security in the home. Recently, it has been found that parents work especially mothers work has a positive outcome for child development. Kembe (2005) revealed that income from mother's work have contributed to the academic achievement of school age children, in addition, quality time spent with children by educated mothers have significantly affected school outcomes positively. Therefore, there must be a balance between work and parenting for a positive and healthy lifestyle.

Parents' social life

Parent's social life is one of the contributory factors on family standard of living. Spio-Gerbral (2000) stated that the stability and well being of any nation depends on the individual families and the social life of the parents. The society today is experiencing a lot of social problems as a result of individual lifestyle choices. Health of family members is structured to a greater extent around their lifestyle choices. Sugh (2007) pointed out that family institution has the responsibility of inculcating traditional Nigeria family values such as humility, respect,

honesty, chastity, decent dressing, justice and moral behaviour to their children. Nestle (2010) however emphasized that healthy lifestyle should be free from the clutches of alcoholism and drug abuse that harm the body and cause social ills. Leisure and how parents spend their leisure determines the social lifestyle of individuals and families.

Hornby (2005) defined leisure as time that is spent doing what one enjoys when he or she is not working or studying. Anyakoha and Eluwa (1999) revealed that leisure or free time is a period of time spent out of working and studying and essential domestic activities especially before or after compulsory activities such as eating, sleeping, going to work, house hold chores and day to day activities. Leisure and recreation are crucial components of balanced and healthy lifestyle. It has the potential of cultivating physical, social, emotional, psychological and mental succor to individuals, thus contributes to physical wellbeing, improve body tone, Increase stamina, develop body coordination, and increase one's ability to resist disease.

According to Cross (2004), leisure and recreation contributes to social cohesion by allowing people to connect and network with others. Involvement in leisure and recreation activities add meaning to individual, family and community life and contributes to peoples overall quality of life (Horris, 2005). Most interestingly, leisure and recreation also contributes to family bonding when families do things together in their leisure time.

Family feeding practices

The family feeding habit may affect the health of individuals in the family. Onyesome, Onyesome, Ofili, Anyanwu and Uzogbu. (2008) in their study found out that feeding habit affect the standard of family living. In certain areas of India, a child may not be fed milk curds, because of a superstitious belief that they inhibit growth. In Nigeria, there are cultural and social inhibitions that prohibit the consumption of certain types of foods by certain groups of people. Ajala, (2006) reported that good nutrition affects the level of physical and social wellbeing of individuals. A family member who lacks essential nutrients may develop deficiency diseases because adequate diet is the first defense against numerous disease and illness. This situation can lead to malnutrition which is one of the most public health problems in Nigeria and a leading cause of infant and child morbidity and mortality, with wasting being the most severe form (Ihenehien, Obasogie, and Egbealue, 2009). In adult it may lead to chronic disease such as diabetes, high blood pressure and stroke in later life. Corbin, Lindsey & Corbin, (2002) added that behaviour such as increase in dietary fiber intake, reduction in fat consumption, increase in fruits and vegetables are good dietary practices that should be adopted by families.

Environmental Practices

The health of family members depends, to a large extent, on sanitary condition of the home, personal and food hygiene practices, (Anyakoha & Eluwa, 1999).

Poor sanitation could result in diseases through the contamination of food and drinking water. Unhygienic practices can place an additional financial and health burden on families as well as lead to exposure and increased risks to diseases such as diarrhea, intestinal infections, polio, typhoid, bilharzias, malaria, worms, eye infections, skin diseases, increased risk for bacterial infections and disease for people with reduced immune systems due to HIV/ AIDS (Nancy & Nimish, 2005) .

Environmental problems associated with unsafe hygienic practices include dispersed and diffuse Pollution of water sources resulting in the water and fecal disease cycle for communities with untreated Water supplies. Poor knowledge and practice of and attitudes to personal hygiene such as hand washing play major roles in the high incidence of communicable diseases and therefore has positive consequences for a child's long term overall development. The hands are probably the single most important route for transmission of infection in the home and community, as they are often in direct contact with the mouth, nose and eyes.

Challenges for promoting healthy lifestyles

The under listed factors impose challenges on achieving healthy living in the family.

1. Family cultural background
2. Lack of quality time spent together as a family.
3. Influence of technologies and media

Family cultural background

Cultural background and feeding habit of the family impose great challenges in achieving healthy lifestyle for the family members. Every nation, tribe, tongue, people or group has a culture which includes its arts, customs, languages, knowledge and religious beliefs. What is perfectly acceptable in one culture may be seen as unacceptable in another. Loromeke (1997) reports that most often parents bring up their children according to the training they also received from their own parents. Therefore, there is a cycle of the same cultural mistakes being repeated from one generation to another. Gidden (2006) also revealed that cultural explanations emphasize the importance of individual lifestyle, for instance what a person chooses to eat can reflect that person's taste and culture. Moreover, parental feeding habits, attitude and behaviour pertaining food preparation, cooking, processing, service, choice and consumption toward certain foods has great effect on individual choices and family health status.

Lack of quality time spent together as a family

Most families are faced with time consuming activities that prevent family members from sharing their feelings and activities together and inculcating positive values and healthy lifestyles. Finding time to spend together in a family is difficult because both parents and the children are busy in work and in school. In many households, parents have to go to work, which limits the

time they have to spend with their children.

In addition, children are involved in school and other activities, only recently, some schools have developed afternoon school lessons, keeping the children after close of school for extra lessons. Furthermore, Okechukwu, (2012) observed that parents spend little or no time at home to assist in the upbringing of the children. If parents have to fulfil their responsibility of socialization of the young, it means adequate time is needed to be with their children for proper upbringing. Women by biological constitution have been recognized as mothers and nurturer of children. They plan and cook meals and take care of house, thus they occupy a central position in determining the quality of life for the house hold and community (Titilayo 2000). Okechukwu, (2012) in his research revealed that many mothers now lack quality time to hear, talk, work, read, cook and play with their children.

Influence of technology and Mass media

Technology and mass media have brought changes to our cultural values. Social networking website (face book, twitters and to-go) is popular especially, among the youths. The use of internet, a global system of interconnectivity provides information to every happening around the world and exposes individuals and families to relationship and social networking among a wide range of diverse individuals. Initially, it was university based facilities to get more current, up-to date information to enhance students'

knowledge but with spread of home-based computers, the internet gradually found its way into household. Teenagers instead of upholding African values, they imitate and build their characters from what they see on the internet.

The use of internet has become a trend; users give importance to the network of face book friends, rather than family members. The consequences of the use of internet on the health of individuals, families, and the nation at large are quite enormous. Cyber crime and national integrity is popping up in the news now more than ever. Murder, fraud and money laundering are some of the reports that are linked to different social media sites. Recently, a 24 year old lady who had been chatting with some new "friends" on face book was robbed and strangled to death by her face book friend on 22nd of July 2012 (<http://news.naij.com/6002.ml>.)

Youths are exposed to all sorts of immoral act through the use of these social media. The negative effect of internet are obvious; opening up one's computer may expose an individual's bank statements, passwords or any other sensitive information on the home computer. Face book does not allow individual to care about his or her surroundings instead it makes one to have less interaction. Researchers have revealed the health implication of spending so much time on the internet, showing cases of obesity, reduces the time for study, leads to conflict and above all makes the user have less concern in the family. Websites provide information about face book addiction disorder (FAD) with the aim of helping

those that are suffering from face book addiction disorder or those that are moving towards this behaviour. Parents should be aware and work hard to perform their duties of proper socialization to build a healthy home.

Strategies for Promoting Positive lifestyles in the Family

Healthy lifestyles can be promoted through several measures. These include;

1. Good Nutrition and feeding habit
2. Observance of good environmental practices and safety habit
3. Re-orientation of Unhealthy Values.

Maintaining healthy family and Nation starts with good nutrition and feeding habit. This is achieved through a meticulous and systematic programme of adequate meal provision.

Ihensekien *et al* (2009) and Kavitha (2009) reported that indigenous food processing methods enhance the nutritive value of staple foods that are readily available. Corbin *et-al* (2002) added that behaviour such as increase in dietary fibre intake, reduction in fat consumption, increase in fruits and vegetables intake are good food habits that should be adopted because of their importance to health. They further revealed that good nutrition is a prime entry point to ending poverty and a milestone to achieving better quality of life, (Ihensekien, Obasigie, and Egbealue, 2009). Environmental sanitation practices encouraged through health education has been associated with low prevalence of communicable diseases in school children. To buttress

this, Pruss, Stun, Bos, Gore and Bartram (2008) in their study on safer water and better health, found out that globally, 2.4 million deaths (4.2% of all deaths) could be prevented annually if everyone practice appropriate sanitation and have good, reliable drinking water.

Re-orientation of Unhealthy Values and Lifestyle in families is also an important way of ensuring a positive lifestyle. Reorientation according Isiakpere (2005), is a process of changing the old and inappropriate values of individuals to enable them appreciate and acquire a new set of values that are appropriate for good citizenship, Nation building, political and family stability.

Conclusion

This paper has shown that for a family to be healthy the family especially the parents who act as role models must possess a healthy lifestyle. It revealed the lapses in parental upbringing and the changing roles of family which has contributed immensely on the present social ill and the menace confronting individuals, families and the society at large. It concludes by stating that the family still remains the bedrock of society and should show concern on the changes that affects it negatively. Recommendations were made on the strategies of promoting healthy family living through good nutrition/feeding habit, Observance of good sanitation and safety habits, Re-orientation of Unhealthy Values and Lifestyle in Families.

Recommendation

Based on the discussions above, the following recommendations were made:

1. Families should show concern about health challenges and healthy lifestyle and work toward minimizing such problems through its change in lifestyle.
2. Home Economics and other family related professions especially those in extension services, should create awareness for appropriate lifestyle which will promote healthy living in families and inform them on the risk of adopting unhealthy lifestyle.
3. Healthy lifestyle concept can be integrated into primary, secondary, and tertiary school curriculum to sensitize individuals on the importance of healthy lifestyle.

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