

Promoting Family Health through Healthy Lifestyles

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Abstract

This paper reviews the concepts of lifestyles and family health. It also examines different types of healthy and unhealthy lifestyles. The paper further discusses various ways of promoting family health through healthy lifestyles.

Key words: Lifestyles, Family, Health, Practices, Exercises

Introduction

Families are the building blocks of all known communities. There cannot be any meaningful promotion of community health without a conscious promotion of family health. Family health refers to the physical, mental, social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of a group consisting of one or two parents, their children and close relations (the family). These dimensions of wellbeing expected to be in top shape among family members have a lot to do with lifestyles.

Lifestyle, according to Stebbin (2009), refers to a characteristic bundle of behaviours that makes sense to both others and oneself in a given time and place, involving social relations, consumption,

entertainment and dress codes. Parks (2007) had earlier observed that the way people live (lifestyle) embraces a whole range of social values, attitudes and activities. Generally, lifestyle is classified as either healthy or unhealthy. This paper therefore focuses on the concepts of lifestyle and family health, types of lifestyles and ways of promoting family health through healthy lifestyles.

Types of Lifestyles

Lifestyles can be healthy or unhealthy. It is important for family members to be aware of the lifestyles

- Unhealthy, negative or hazardous lifestyles are ways of living which constitute obvious danger to the health and wellbeing of the individual involved and, in some

cases, to those of other persons. These include such risky behaviours as drug abuse, alcohol abuse, smoking/tobacco use, child abuse, domestic violence, and sedentary lifestyle. Others are suicidal behaviours, such as risky behaviours of keeping of multitude sex partners, selling and buying of sex, unprotected sex, and early sexual debut, among others. These behaviours impinge on both personal and family health. On the other hand, the reverse of these behaviours, otherwise referred to as healthy or positive lifestyle promotes both personal and family health.

- Healthy or positive lifestyle practices are those ways of living that lower the risk of being ill or dying early (WHO, 1998). In other words, healthy lifestyles include one's chosen ways of living which constitutes less danger to his/her and other persons' wellness and longevity. A number of these lifestyles have been identified by Onuzullike (2007), WHO (2009), and Okafor (2009), among others. For the purpose of the present discourse, Okafor's (2009) documentation of twelve healthy lifestyles which appears comprehensive will be used. These lifestyles include regular exercise, eating right, effective stress management, and maintaining personal hygiene. Others include adopting good safety habits, avoiding destructive habits, being a skilled consumer, and practicing basic first-

aid skills. He further identified – practicing healthful sex, protecting the environment, seeing and complying with medical advice, and proper time management.

Lifestyles that Promote Family Health

- *Regular physical exercises:* Encouraging every family member to engage in regular physical exercises is one sure way of promoting family health. Studies have established that exercises lower the risk of high blood pressure, obesity, diabetes mellitus, and other degenerative health conditions (Okafor, 2009). One may not necessarily have to go outdoors to 'catch' a dose of regular physical exercise. Such exercises can be performed within the confines of one's bedroom. These include jogging, rope skipping, brisk walking, and body stretching, among others. Buying and using such simple equipment as a "stepper" can make indoor physical exercise more regular, convenient and safe. However, physical exercises must be in keeping with one's age and health status. This suggests the need to consult with one's physician and taking informed exercise prescriptions from experts before embarking on an exercise regime.

- *Adequate and healthful diets.* Adequate nutritional practices involve eating food rich in such nutrients as vitamins, minerals and

protein. It also involves the consumption of moderate carbohydrates, less fat, much water and vegetables. These reduce the risk of diabetes, heart diseases, and other degenerative healthy conditions. Adequate and healthful diets alone however, may not be enough to promote family health. The need arises to add proper stress management practices to adequate nutrition.

• *Adequate Stress Management:* Stress generally is any situation that upsets a person's internal/external order or peace. Unmanaged stress often leads to distress and such associated health conditions as cardiovascular disorders, cancer, diabetes and other debilitating health conditions. To promote family health, members need to master and practice the art of stress management. Okafor and Okafor (1998: 125-126) provided a guideline for this, as follows:

- Adopt a new way of looking at life
- Maintain a positive outlook on life
- Develop and maintain a regular exercise programme
- Be reasonably organized
- Learn to say no
- Do not be a perfectionist
- Be other-oriented
- Let go of the past
- Eat a proper diet

- Do not depend on alcohol and other drugs for stress reduction
- Ensure you have adequate sleep.

• *Simple personal hygiene among family members:* These range from hand washing, avoidance of dirt, to proper body grooming. By observing regular hand washing after urinating, defecating, handling potentially harmful or germ-conveying objects will always protect family members from ingesting pathogenic micro-organism or harmful substances. Such other practices as regular cutting of finger nails, wearing of clean dresses, taking adequate bath, among others, enhance the personal health of family members.

• *Good Safety habits:* This presupposes that every family member should be taught basic safety habits from the cradle, especially at home. Children should be taught to avoid dangerous plays and to exercise caution in the use of potentially harmful household gadgets and equipments. This way, the rate of accidents is reduced thus promoting health and longevity.

• *Proper use of drugs:* Promoting the health and longevity of family members, however, will remain a mirage if the individuals involved do not avoid drugs, alcohol and tobacco misuse or abuse as the case may be. Cigarette and tobacco smoking has been linked to such cardio-respiratory conditions as heart

attack, high blood pressure, stroke, lung cancer, among others (Ene, 2004; Onuzulike, 2009; Okafor, 2009). Excessive alcohol consumption, on the other hand, leads to such negative health outcomes as depression, violent behaviours, self-destructive behaviours, among others. Any effort to promote family health, therefore, must take into account promoting abstinence from cigarette/tobacco smoking and use, drug abuse, and excessive alcohol consumption.

- *Healthy Sexual Behaviour:* Sexual practices play a serious role in the determination of family health status. Ezedum (1999) highlighted the negative effects of such unhealthy sexual and reproductive practices as early sexual debut, unprotected sex, buying and selling of sex, keeping of multiple sexual partners and procurement of illegal abortion. For instance, initiating sex early in life leaves the girl-child mentally unprepared to bargain for safe sex, while unprotected sex results in unwanted pregnancies with such associated problems as criminal abortion and death, HIV/AIDS and STIs transmission, among others. Buying and selling of sex by family members usually create the problems associated with unsafe sex. This is because while the “seller” loses the bargaining power for safe sex, the buyer insists on

getting maximum satisfaction from the “goods” he paid for. This results in failure to insist on and adopt protected sex by the parties involved (Ezedum, 1999). Furthermore, the keeping of multiple sexual partners compounds the sexual network and promotes the spread of HIV/AIDS and STIs (Ezedum, 1999). To promote family health, therefore, family members must make conscious, determined efforts to avoid these discussed risky sexual behaviours. Achieving this often requires developing a strong faith that enlightens the family members to see such practices as bad.

- *Other Healthy Lifestyles:* The promotion of family health must factor in such other healthy lifestyles as proper time management, regular medical checks, and environmental protection. Others include being a wise consumer of goods and services, as well as acquiring and using basic first aid skills capable of addressing various domestic health emergencies before the arrival of medical help.

Conclusion

The promotion of family healthy is the responsibility of all family members it calls for cooperation and active involvement of all members of the family. Such promotion does not just happen. It takes conscious purposeful effort of all concerned.

No amount of effort put into promoting family health can be too much. No such effort also goes unrewarded.

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