The Influence of "Big Food" on Obesity

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Introduction & Background

- **Obesity**, which is caused by changes in diet and physical activity, is on the rise on a national and global scale, and there is a very urgent need for successful interventions.
  - Obesity is defined as having a body mass index (BMI) ≥ 30 kg/m² for adults 20 years or older (WHO, 2020).
  - In 2016, about 13% of adults, 6% of girls and 8% of boys were obese, and the rates are still rising (WHO, 2021).
  - Despite a multitude of efforts, "no country has successfully lowered obesity rates between 1990 and 2019" (Lauber et al., 2021).
- Though individual factors are at play, research shows a major obesity contributor is "**Big Food**," or major processed food manufacturers like restaurants chains and supermarkets (Otterbach et al., 2021). Their rapid expansion has led to massive consumption of highly processed foods and beverages, ultimately driving unhealthy diets.
- In addition, there is emerging research of how the processed food industry undermines and evades effective regulation and public health policies.

Purpose Statement & Research Question

- The purpose of this research is to examine the role that food manufacturers have in contributing to the obesity epidemic and strategies they use to navigate around health policies.

Is there evidence of a primary role that the processed food industry plays in enabling the obesity rates nationally and worldwide through political and market strategies?

Literature Review Methods

- **Search methods:** ETSU Sherrod Library database, PubMed, Google Scholar
- **Key words and phrases:** "Big Food and obesity," "marketing and obesity," "relationship between obesity and food corporations"
- The **inclusion** criteria included articles that discussed the impact of the food industry on obesity through political and marketing strategies.
- The **exclusion** criteria included articles that did not discuss a link between the food industry and obesity and were not written within the past five years.
- Of the multitude of sources analyzed, five peer-reviewed sources were ultimately chosen.

Findings

- The different studies provided evidence that "Big Food" **plays a significant role in exacerbating public health issues** – especially obesity – by identifying old and new techniques such as:
  - Increasing health and nutrition claims on child-targeted supermarket products, despite over 85% of the items maintaining poor nutritional quality (Elliott, 2019).
  - Creating a saturated environment, where there is a "56% probability of being overweight or obese when living close (0-10km) to a supermarket or fast-food restaurant" (Otterbach et al., 2021).
  - Framing health problems in a way that distances their role in the matter and poses proposed solutions as too simple or non-multifaceted (Petticrew et al., 2017).
- These and many other strategies function as a significant barrier to progress.

Conclusion & Nursing Implications

- There is no doubt now that "Big Food" has a hand in devising market strategies and influencing public health policies towards their favor on a national and global scale. Thus, there is a need for further research to **identify** other strategies and how to **dismantle** them (Wood et al., 2021).
- Nurses can **push** for national and global regulations and **educate** patients about food retailer influence and making better food choices (Otterbach et al., 2021).

Note. *A woman passes an advertisement outside a fast food restaurant on Jan. 7, 2013 in Bristol, England* [Photograph], by Cardy, M., 2014, Getty Images (http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2014/2/2/who-fighter-economicregulationneededtoreverseobesitypidemic.html)

References

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