

# Overweight and Obesity Environmental Scan in a Low Income Urban Setting: What can Health Policies do?

Kyle Esdaille, MPH

Morgan State University

School of Community Health and Policy

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# Presentation Objectives

- Discuss the problem
- Describe the environmental scan method
- List lessons learned with supporting evidence
- Make recommendations

# Background

- Obesity has rapidly increased in minority and low-income communities, especially among children.
- Associated factors:
  - Environments in which they reside
  - Ability to participate in physical activity
  - Nutritional habits

(Johnson-Down et al., 1997; O' Loughlin et al., 2000; French et al., 2001)

# Role of Public Policies

- Federal, state and local public policies in the form of:
  - legislation
  - funding
  - programs
  - standards and regulations by public agencies
  - and rulings by courts (case law)

(Longest, 1998; The Finance Project, 2004; Weiss and Smith, 2004; Sallis et al., 1998)

# Significance

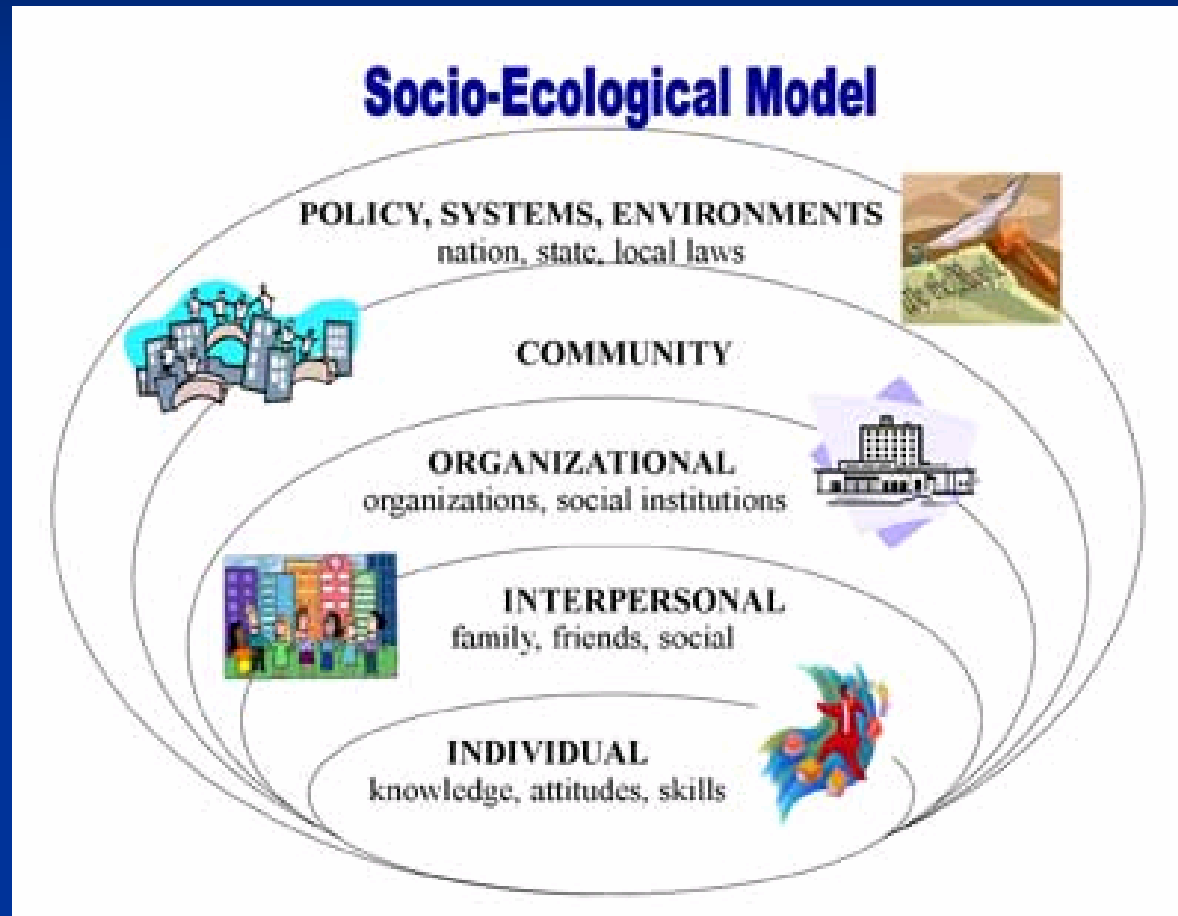
- The estimated total cost of obesity in the United States in 2000 was about \$117 billion.
- Maryland estimated in 2004 that 1,553 million dollars in annual medical expenditures were attributable to obesity.

(Department of Health and Human Services, 2007; The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

# Research Question

- How can physical activity and nutrition policies be used to inform program planning to address obesity reduction in a low income, minority, urban community?

# Conceptual Model



# Study Objectives

- Determine the existence of policies targeting physical activity and overweight/obesity
- Obtain data on awareness of these policies



# Study Objectives

- Obtain data on community members' willingness to advocate for these policies
- Make recommendations to address the gaps in the public policies

# Environmental Scan Method

- Part1

- Document Review

- Public policy documents
    - Government websites
    - Reports of policies addressing obesity

# Environmental Scan Method

## ■ Part2

- In-depth Interviews: 5 individuals
  - 2 program directors
  - 1 community advocate
  - 2 state health department employees

# Environmental Scan Method

- Part 3
  - Social meetings: 16 social meetings
    - At a health fair
    - At their residences

# Environmental Scan Method

- Neighborhood Scans
- Sampling by snowballing
- Data Analysis: Simple coding method

# Study Setting

- Population
  - 71.2% African American
  - 24.6% White
  - 1.1% Asian
  - 1.2 % Hispanic
  - 1.9% other races

# Study Setting

- 53% of men and 62% of women in this Baltimore community are overweight or obese
- Community median income: \$23,070
- Baltimore's median income: \$30,078
- 52% of the community earns less than \$25,000 per annum

Data Source: Baltimore Neighborhood Indicator Alliance (2006 & 2003); Morgan-Hopkins Center for Health Disparities Solutions (2005)

# Lessons Learned

- Generally stakeholders were unaware of health policies.

**“I would say it is a combination of education about how to prevent chronic diseases and a lack of awareness of what they need to know”.**

State Health Employee



# Lessons Learned

Literacy level must be incorporated into educational efforts within the community.

**“I guess literacy hasn’t been a conscious thought on peoples’ minds as to how that impacts services.”**

Community Program Director

# Lessons Learned

The community's cultural perception about weight and body size is unique.

*“We sometimes equate being big with doing good (or) being well”.*

Community Advocate

# Lessons Learned

There is a lack of access to preventative health care and healthy foods.

*“I think lack of access is another whole area which includes access to preventive healthcare and access to healthy food options.”*

State Health Employee

# Lessons Learned

There is limited funding for physical activity and nutritional programs within the community.

- CDC provides funding (\$37 million, 2006) for overweight and obesity initiatives in 28 states.
- Maryland Physical Activity and Nutrition program receives funding from CDC 2003 - 2008.

CDC; Finkelstein, Fiebelkorn, and Wang, 2004

# Lessons Learned

Community views poverty as the most notable factor associated with high rates of overweight and obesity within their community.

*“The underlying factor for a lot of what I work with on an ongoing basis is poverty. People can’t afford to eat nutritiously. Poverty is a major contributing factor”.*

Community Program Director

# Poverty





# Poverty



# Lessons Learned

- Policies targeting physical activity and overweight/obesity do exist and address some of the community's concerns.
- None of the physical activity and nutrition policies specifically target cultural factors, poverty, and health literacy to address overweight and obesity.



# Lessons Learned

- Most of the community believe that overweight and obesity are problems in the community.
- A majority of community members are willing to advocate for increased physical activity and proper nutrition in the community.

# Recommendations

- Advertise policy initiatives and educate the community about them.
- Involve the community in the policy process.

# Recommendations

- Ensure that physical activity and nutrition policies result in increased funding for intervention programs.
- Ensure that policy and programmatic interventions target environmental and social issues.

# Conclusion

- Physical activity and nutrition policies in a low income, minority, and urban setting can be more effective if specific characteristics of the community, such as poverty, health literacy, and cultural values are considered.

# Conclusion

- The community should be empowered by the the policies to allow obesity and other health problems to be viewed as priorities in the context of day to day life challenges.

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