



THE ROLE OF THE GOVERNMENT (POLICE POWER, PATERNALISM) AGAINST THE OBESITY IN GULF COUNTRIES

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According to the new definition of the W.H.O for the obesity, it is consider as disease. I can consider it one of the serious disease because it lead to a lot of chronic disease (Diabetes Mellitus, hypertension, hyperlipidemia, osteoarthritis, metabolic disease, coronary heart disease...etc). Obesity usually determined by the body mass index which is affected by the weight and height. World Health Organization (WHO) defines obesity as body mass index (BMI) of 30 kg/m² or more and it considers the obesity increase quickly from 1980 – 2008 which consider as important health issue. Overweight defines as body mass index more than 25 and less than 30 which consider as risk factor for the metabolic disease. When look for the map of WHO which is explain the percentage of the obesity and overweight over the world, we can consider the countries in the gulf region at the highest prevalence with some variation from country to another country. The highest prevalence of the overweight among the gulf region is Kuwait by 79.3 % followed by the following (Qatar by 72.2%, Emirates by 72%, Bahrain by 72%, Saudi Arabia by 71.3% then finally Oman by 57.5%). Regarding the obesity over the world, we can find the highest prevalence among (U.S.A, Gulf region, South Africa). In the gulf region also, the highest prevalence of obesity in Kuwait by 42.8 % then followed by Saudi Arabia by 35.2 % and the last will be Oman by 22%.^[1]

The Gulf region consists of 6 countries and there is a lot of things similar between these countries (social, economic, health,...). One of the most reason for the increase of the obesity is oil production which make the gulf region and change some of the social behavior like the transportation (use of the car, lifestyle modification (unhealthy diet, decrease exercise).^[2] Another important factor for the increase obesity in the gulf region was the population transition from rural area which had **Bedouin** lifestyle (usually take care about the camel, had more exercise, eat traditionally food which is consider as healthy food) and there was study from Emirate support that idea.^[3] Also, one of the reason for increase the obesity is increase the number of fast food restaurant which make strong attraction for the teenagers population in the gulf region as example: in some area of the desert in Kuwait will find the fast food restaurant, In Emirates as example: will find the fast food in the highway road.^[2] There is study done in Saudi Arabia about the obesity in the country and compare between the cities. The finding from that study was the lowest prevalence of the obesity was in the south east region as example (Jizan by 12%) which is related to the active lifestyle in that area (fishing, farming) also, related to the healthy food (honey, fish, milk). While in the same study found the capital city of Saudi Arabia had the prevalence of the obesity by 22% which is related to transportation (cars), high fatty food consumption, decrease exercise.^[4]

^{5]} In gulf region will be obvious to find the obesity in the

women is more than men as example, there was study in Kuwait done showed 77 percent of women and 74 percent of men are overweight, while 48 percent of women and 31 percent of men are obese.^[9] One of the reason for the obesity was explained in one of the study, increase the outdoor temperature which make most of the people inside the door inactive physically.^[6]

I think the previous cause is not make sense for me because in the winter season suitable for the people to be active, there is a lot of the fitness centers over the region, during prayer times usually the people walking five times per day. I had some of the patient who mention that cause as excuse for him or her but who is physically inactive will continue on that behavior in any season. Also, There is result from study in Emirate may be consider as strange result which is the parents of the child thought the obesity is a sign of beauty, high income status.^[7] I think the previous reason is true even in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia when there is parents came to my clinic ask for medication to increase the appetite of the baby and lead to increase the weight because they thought the baby not eat will. Most of the cases when I compare between the weight and height and put it on growth chart, I found most of them within normal weight. The parents may be affected by the health belief from surrounding.

According to M Nestle and M F Jacobson in their article about the obesity, There is important role for the government to activate and support the role of public health. The public health has an important role to evaluate the school regarding obesity issue. He mentions the importance role of the public health in starting good health education campaign in the school about the obesity. Also, there is important role of the public health to be involved in the school curriculum about the nutrition, the importance of the exercise and the weight management. The author, it is important for school to increase the number of sport classes. Also, the government should have important role by itself in decrease the obesity and increase the health nutrition through Government cafeteria, prisons,... ect. Because the obesity consider as serious disease so, usually the authors mention about some of the solution which may be effective and helpful for the obesity problem. M Nestle and M F Jacobson they think one of the most important to fight the obesity is food labelling through the calorie content of the food or soft drink on the menu board. Also, the authors suggested to had strong restriction about the advertisement of the fast food over the T.V or other social media. One of the other solution suggested to increase the tax on the fast food restaurant, soft drinks, decrease the tax on the exercise machines. Also, one of the suggestion to decrease the obesity is increase the tax on the car and decrease the tax on the bicycle, give funds for swimming pool, sports center.^[8]

Jeffrey Algazy in his paper about Why governments must lead the fight against obesity, he thinks The author thinks, one of the most common country over the world face the obesity problem which consider as risk factor of diabetes mellitus. Diabetes mellitus in Saudi arabia consider as the second highest prevalence over the world which consider nearly 1 in 5 compare to 1 in 10 worldwide. Saudi Arabia which is part of the gulf region spend a lot of the funding to fight the diabetes mellitus and its related complication. The second disease cost a lot for the Saudi government is diabetes mellitus as a proportion of total health expenditure. The government should deal with obesity and diabetes mellitus as serious problem which will effect on the health of the community and the cost effective for the government to fight and overcome these two health problems. When the kingdom of Saudi Arabia success against the obesity and diabetes and decrease the prevalence of both, this is will lead other countries in the gulf region to work against diabetes and make cooperation with the kingdom of Saudi arabia (the author did not mention why? but I think because the size of the kingdom and the highest number of the health care provider put it as role model for the health issue over the region?). The author also suggests, the kingdom of Saudi Arabia should establish comprehensive prevention and treatment program for the obesity, pre-diabetes, diabetes. These prevention program should involve the dietary food, soft drink, fast food, exercise. Also, suggests to use the incentive issue from the government toward the sectors who will be

involved in the prevention program. The author mentions "Only governments have the authority to issue the policies and regulations needed to combat some of the forces contributing to the pandemic Governments have responsibility for the health and economic well-being of their populations, and they must shoulder many of the pandemic's costs."^[9]

So, in this article the author explain the severity of the obesity in Saudi Arabia and I think he agree to use the role and regulation which can be consider as Police power, Paternalism issue, which may be face resist from the owners of the fast food or the business men in general but I think the regulation will overcome their opinions. One of the example for that, the fast food restaurants in Riyadh (Capital City of Saudi Arabia) were open up to 4 morning then the local state in Riyadh allow for restaurant food to open until 12 mid-night which lead to decrease the number of the costumer at that time and there was no objection from the owners. This is give example about the strong of the regulation inside the kingdom of Saudi Arabia but I think in need for public health to be involved in the decision making of the things related to the population. Also, we need more information and research about the Belief and the attitude of the owners of the fast food toward such regulation and policy. Still there is lack in the research about this point and need to encourage the restaurant who make healthy food and make advertisement for them.

Paternalism of the government consider as one of the most difficult issue to deal with it in developed country in contrast to developing country which can be easy accepted and to be followed.

According to *Michael S. Merry*, "Paternalism involves interference with the liberty of others with the aim of promoting some good, and this commonly occurs during moments of perceived harm. But before there is harm there is risk of harm. There is risk both to one's present and to one's future health states, as well as risks to one's general state of well-being decisions about public health should be deliberated upon democratically. Of course the state has reasons to promote safety, good health, education, etc., but for its interference to be perceived as legitimate by a majority of society's members, it will need to make its decisions in as democratic a way as possible, procuring the consent of the governed—particularly when many of the so-called offenders are vulnerable to the stigmatization that both precedes and follows punitive actions imposed by the state. As I have already shown, interventions in liberal democratic societies are often decidedly harmful, even when the aim is to prevent harm."^[10]

Actually, in Gulf region the restriction roles and the policy issue consider as part of the organization and regulation which should be followed and not consider as paternalism among the general population but the

problem is the involvement of the public health in such regulation and organization. Another problem in the public health in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, they divide themselves to their interest which is mean some of them concern about the smoking and some of them concern about the obesity and there is no general guidelines for them to make the population healthy as general. As the example, 10 years ago, there was ban to smoke shisha inside the capital city of Saudi Arabia and instruct the places of shisha smoking to move outside the city. This is done by the role and the effect of anti-smoking society.

CONCLUSION

The obesity in gulf region will be pandemic and will lead to serious health issue over the gulf region. This is will effect on the productivity of the country and will increase the cost of the health care and the rehabilitation issue which will be result from the obesity and its related disease. I think one of the most important solution to overcome this problem is to use the police power by the Government to have the authority to act in the interested of the health, safety, and welfare of the public by increase the tax for fast food restaurant, encourage healthy food, decrease opening hour of fast food, share and activate the role of the public health. Also, I think should use the role of the paternalism inside the school (Primary, Intermediate, Secondary school) in all the level and prohibited any soft drink and increase the sport classes. One of the important ethical issue to be involved in the future plan to fight the obesity is the role of the libertarian paternalism which was written by Thaler RH and Sunstein.^[11] I think this ethical issue one of the most important to deal with the adult and to be sure about the continuity of it. The public health members can involve this issue in the restaurant, grocery, stores, and government cafeteria. According to CDC The strong factor that affect heath is socioeconomic factors, then followed by changing the context to make the choice of the individual healthy as example increase the tax of the fast food. The smallest impact will be the counselling and education. So, I think this is one of the most important issue to work on it in the recommendation stages and look for the most effective factor.

Recommendations

- I Recommend to concentrate more about the socioeconomic factors and look for the policy and regulation which can change the behavior of unhealthy habit and decrease the prevalence of it more than just give education and counselling for the population.
- The public health faculty in the gulf region should arrange meeting together and make organization committee for them.
- The committee of the public health should look for the general health of the population as the main area for them and not divide them self to interested health problem.

- Need to activate the role of the public health in the (Primary, intermediate, and secondary school) by increase the health education about healthy food, the importance of exercise, and the effect of smoking.
- Need to attract some of the teachers and to let them as role model inside the school and make cooperation with them.
- I recommend to establish more specific research about the resistant of the fast food restaurant to avoid the food labelling ? the attraction of the young population to the fast food, and research about the outcome of the increase tax on the fast food restaurant.
- Need to involve the university especially the department of the family and community medicine in establish strong program against the obesity by increase the awareness, more research, use the role of the social network.
- Need to measure the effect of any paternalism issue happen like increase the tax of the fast food, need research long period to estimate is that paternalism role decrease the prevalence of the obesity.
- Need to have cooperation between multiple ministries to work against the obesity as (Ministry of Health, ministry of planning, Ministry of higher education, ... etc.)
- Should the countries in the gulf region look for the experience of Oman and explain why the prevalence of obesity in Oman (low) compare to another countries.

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