

Children as Change Agents in Reducing the Weight and Overweight Mothers: A Community Based Health Promotion Intervention in Anuradhapura District

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Overweight is a major risk factor for non- communicable diseases (NCD) among women in Sri Lanka, which can be prevented through lifestyle modifications. Overweight (45.3%, n=53) was identified as a priority health concern among women in Velankulama, a rural area in Anuradhapura district. A community based health promotion intervention was launched through “Mihindu Children Society”, where children were trained to act as agents in promoting healthy lifestyles among women between 20 to 50 years of age in Velankulama.

With the awakened understanding of having high rate of overweight among mothers and other women in the village (n=53), children were taken to mediate the action in reducing overweight in their own community. With the training provided by health promotion facilitators, children implemented a health promotion camp to educate women in the village on NCDs, its’ modifiable risk factors and simple measures to reduce overweight. Children measured BMI of women in the village once in 3 months for 1 year. Mothers’ active groups were formed to take collective community actions such as exercising, performing in leisure times. Participatory Action Research model was used for the health promotion intervention and pre and post-test evaluation was done to assess the changes.

From pre-test to post-test percentage of overweight mothers was reduced from 45.3% to 22.6% (n= 53) among women included in the intervention. The diet and physical inactivity were the significantly modified factors among women. The sub culture of the village was changed towards less-stigma attached for exercising and running.

The piloted intervention was effective in reducing overweight among women in Velankulama. Generating a trend of healthy lifestyle modifications in the whole community seems to be an effective approach where children can act as agents in generating the change.

Key words: *Health promotion, Life style modification, Overweight*