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Chile, Malnutrition

Obesity growing to be a big concern for Chile

Countries around the world face many barriers that have the potential to cause major damage to not only that country, but the surrounding countries as well. It is important for us to recognize these problems and search for effective ways to solve them. Chile is just one of these countries that face a barrier, that barrier being malnutrition and more specifically, obesity.

To understand the barriers facing Chile, it is important to first gain a quick understanding and knowledge of Chile as a whole. Chile is a long narrow country on the western coast of South America. Chile is a relatively large country as it is the 38th largest country in the world according to land area (Population). Chile's population has also steadily been increasing with the current population being 18,162,199, as of April 1, 2018 (Population). Out of the entire population of Chile, about 90.8 percent is urban and 9.2 percent is rural (Live). This shows that the vast majority of the population resides within the cities of Chile, rather than in smaller communities outside of the bigger cities.

Chile's government style is a representative democratic republic as of 1990, after Chile was being controlled by a military regime. Under this new representative democratic republic, the president serves as the head of state and government, while the congress is split into the chamber of deputies and the Senate (Pariona). The government will need to become a vital part of solving the malnutrition problem in Chile.

Farming is a relatively small industry within Chile. Only 21.21 percent of Chile's land is used for agriculture of any kind (Agricultural Land). This is probably caused because of the geography and climate of Chile does not allow for the best land and conditions for agricultural practices. Northern Chile's land is predominately the Atacama Desert, in which the conditions are too harsh and dry to sustain agriculture. The Andes Mountains on the Eastern coast of Chile also make farming difficult. Most of the land used for farming in Chile is in the Central Valley of Chile. Chile's top main exports include fruits/frozen juices, copper, fish, wine, industrial chemicals, farming materials, and lumber (Trade). Chilean farms are relatively small, as the average farm size is only 17.16 hectares or 42.4 acres (Global). This is very small in comparison to the farms that are in Iowa, with the average Iowa farm being 345 acres (Average Farm Size). The small farm sizes seem logical, as most of their crops grown are small fruits and are not row crops like the crops grown in Iowa.

The typical family in Chile is similar to the families in the United States of America and even in Iowa. Most consists of two parents with one or two children. They also live in houses very similar to those of an American home. Chileans tend to eat a lot of seafood due to the western coast of the country in which is connected to the Pacific Ocean, as well as consumer an abundance of fresh fruit because it is grown within the country (Chilean Food). Chilean food markets are very similar to that of America. Many Chileans work in jobs in the service sector such as health workers and teachers as well as many in agricultural related careers such as forestry, fishing, mining and manufacturing (Jobs). The average wage in Santiago, Chile's capital, is 861 U.S. dollars, which is a surprisingly low amount in comparison to the cost of living in Santiago which is quite costly on its own (Average and Minimum Salary). This could be considered a barrier that Chileans have to face. This would be another barrier that should be looked into in Chile's future, so that it would help Chilean families be able to purchase everything they need to thrive.

Education in Chile is pretty good and is affordable because the Chilean Government pays for 90 percent

(Education). This helps to ensure that many Chilean children are able to go to school and get the necessary education they need. This educational component will become vital when looking for ways to face the malnutrition barrier in Chile. Healthcare in Chile is also easily accessible to most Chileans, as they offered a form of free public healthcare or can have private healthcare, however, some public hospitals do not have access to newer, more advanced technologies (Healthcare). Most Chileans do have access to the basic commodities of life including clean water, electricity, telephones, and markets.

Malnutrition is a big challenge facing Chile. When most people hear the word malnutrition, their mind automatically thinks about people who do not get enough food to eat, however, that is not the case in Chile. Chile's malnutrition problem is more specific to obesity. In fact, sixty-seven percent of Chileans who are above the age of fifteen are overweight or obese (Smith). The severity of the situation becomes easily recognizable as almost every hour one Chilean citizen would die due to obesity or the complications that come from obesity (Cohen). To figure out the causes of this problem, researchers need to delve into the habits of typical families as well as consider other factors that influence them.

In the past, Chile did not have a big problem with obesity, but it is getting to be a growing problem as time passes. The main cause of the spread of obesity within Chile and other countries like it is the change in diet, as more and more people are consuming high energy-dense foods and caloric beverages, animal-source foods, and caloric sweeteners (Bambs). In fact, Chile has been reported to be the world's largest per-capita consumer of sugary drinks even over the United States of America according to a World Economic Forum Report. The consumption of this packaged unhealthy food has risen all across Chile in both rural and urban areas (Smith). Chileans are also choosing to consume these unhealthier processed foods because they are less expensive than purchasing fresh foods that are growing more expensive (Silva). However, this unhealthy consumption of unhealthy foods is not the only contributor to this widespread obesity problem in Chile. Many Chileans have adopted a sedentary lifestyle. More than eighty percent of the Chilean population exercises for less than an hour every week (Silva). If you add this sedentary, non-active lifestyle to the unhealthy foods consumed within Chile, it makes it very easy for obesity to become an overwhelming problem.

Obesity can be a problem that anyone can have; however, it does affect some groups more than others. This obesity problem within Chile affects people with low education levels and those in low socioeconomic groups the most (Bambs); however, it also greatly affects children within Chile. When comparing boys versus girls thirty seven percent of boys in Chile are considered overweight, with twelve percent considered obese (Owens). While thirty two percent of girls in Chile are considered overweight, twelve percent of them are considered obese as well (Owens). The same gender trend is also seen in adults, as there are more Chilean men that are classified as overweight than that of Chilean women. Sixty eight percent of Chilean men are classified as overweight with twenty two percent of them being classified as obese, whereas sixty four percent of Chilean women are classified as overweight and thirty percent of them are classified as obese (Owens). This shows that there are more Chilean men that are overweight than that of women, however, more Chilean women are classified more obese than that of Chilean men. The same trend happens with boys' and girls' obesity rates. Although anyone can have problems with obesity, as it is not specific to gender, race, or age.

Like many situations the first step in solving problems is acknowledging that there is one. Chile has already recognized that there is an obesity concern within the people living there and has worked to try multiple different ways to make it less of a prominent issue. Some of these ways have cut down the issues with obesity, but have not caused significant results. However, implementing different programs or making minor changes to the current programs could improve the obesity concern and help to make Chile an overall healthier country.

One way that the Chilean government has started to overcome obesity is by putting labels on heavily

processed and unhealthy foods, in hopes to try and prevent Chileans from purchasing them and eating them in heavy quantities. This has not quite worked to the full extent of what they were originally hoping for due to a couple factors. First of all, the labels claiming that the foods were unhealthy are most often printed in a small font in places where consumers would not generally look. Another factor with these labels was that only around thirty percent of consumers actually read them and of those thirty percent, approximately only thirty percent of them actually understand them (Smith). Since then the government and food processing companies have actually updated the labels so they are more prominent on the packaging and hard to miss. Although these labels are on a majority of the foods that people have been used to buying, and there is only a small selection of foods that do not have these labels. Another benefit of these labels is that if a product has a black label, it cannot be marketed towards children in any way and also cannot be sold in or near schools (Smith). This should encourage children to start eating healthier because these foods would not be as tempting to them and they would be more used to the healthier foods provided by the schools. However, this will not stop them from returning to these unhealthy foods when they get home from school. Chile should continue to implement these tactics, however, educating the people of Chile about them needs to occur to make this more successful.

If I were to be put in charge of finding a solution for Chile's obesity problem, the first thing I would do would be to inform children, at a young age, in school about healthy foods and continue to reinforce the positive sides of eating healthy as they grow older. I would recommend starting healthy habit classes in second grade, when students have more choices on what foods they are putting into their bodies and are able to understand the consequences of different situations. I believe the individuals best suited for this responsibility would be the traditional school teachers. The teacher could attend a class every year to learn suggestions on what to teach their students in relation to healthy eating and exercise. This would also reduce costs, as schools would not have to hire another teacher or pay for someone else to come into to the classrooms. If families start the children off eating healthy at a young age, it will become almost a habit for them to eat healthy. Along with this, schools would want to continue this education for a majority of the student's school careers to instill these habits even more. However, this might not work to its full extent, because after the children go home from school, they will have full access to unhealthy food again and if their parents do not eat the appropriate foods, students might do the same. With this, we would have to educate adults, as well, about the negative side effects of obesity so that they will try and change for the sake of their children. After about twenty years of educating students, when they begin to start families, funding towards the obesity education programs could potentially decrease due to healthy eating and exercise habits.

A big problem that has contributed to the obesity epidemic in Chile is the cost of healthy food options in comparison to processed foods. Finding a way to make healthy foods the more affordable choice is key in solving the obesity cycle in Chile. One way to overcome this challenge would be to work out a way to provide children and families access to fresh fruits or vegetables. This could be done by starting gardens or farms managed by the communities or even possibly setting up gardens in schools so that the food produced can be used in the lunch program or sent home with students. An example of an organization currently working on a similar situation is Ciades Sem Fome, which means cities without hunger. It is a Brazilian organization that turns unused land into community gardens or greenhouses to be used by the schools or communities. In places used for school gardens, the organization also offers food and nutritional education (Gaeta). If Chile were to implement a program like this, the bigger communities would benefit the most and this is why I believe it would help to add healthy eating as an educational aspect, as well as food accessibility, which are the root causes of Chile's obesity problem.

Another way to convince Chileans to make healthier decisions on what they purchase is by taxing the price of unhealthy foods. This would be similar to something that Mexico has done in the past to cut down on unhealthy sugary drink consumption. Mexico installed a ten percent tax on sugar-sweetened

drinks in January of 2014. At first, the tax in Mexico was met with many angry people as they would now have to pay more for the drinks they were so accustomed to drinking. The same problem might have if the government were to implement this tax or something similar in Chile. It could also potentially cause a backlash from soda companies that make a wide profit selling to Chilean outlets. Although there was negativity the soda tax actually cut pop consumption in Mexico by roughly twelve percent (Howard). This is not a drastic change, but would help make a positive effect in Chile as Chile is one of the world's highest consumers of sugary beverages (Luxton). In Mexico, it was projected to save them around one billion dollars in health care expenditures by decreasing the amount of people with type two diabetes and decreasing the amount of heart attacks and strokes related to obesity (Howard). Also with this tax, the extra money being made could go towards the education of the public and children in schools about the negative effects of obesity and how they could eat healthier to be healthier.

Alongside the educational aspect to cut down obesity in Chile, getting other organizations involved might be another beneficial solution. One organization that could potentially be able to help the fate of obesity in Chile is the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, also known as FAO. First of all, Chile has been part of the United Nations since October of 1945 and helps with the peacekeeping aspect of the organization by providing troops and support services in various other countries (Chile and the United Nations). The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nation works through a people centered approach and have many programs within to reach its many goals. Two parts of FAO's nutrition strategy that could help Chile are "develop countries' capacities to evaluate and monitor nutrition situations, analyze options, and implement agricultural policies and programmes that impact positively on nutrition" (Nutrition 1) and "provide tools, guidance and support for the scaling up of proper nutrition education and consumer awareness at national and local levels." (Nutrition 2).

This would not be enough to completely eliminate Chile's obesity problem and there will never be a way to completely eradicate it. However, to make this work out as smoothly as possible, the government, schools, and the public are going to have to work together. The government would have to give funding to the schools to start these new programs. Yet, it would have to be up to the government to provide funding. They could get some of this funding from the soda tax and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Having multiple ways of obtaining money for funding these programs would allow it to continue to be sustainable for many years. Also, as more and more people stop buying sugary beverages, they would be making less and less money from the tax. They would be able to gradually reduce the amount of money put into the obesity education programs at the schools because they will, for the most part, be educated and those healthier habits would continue to be instilled in them as they continue with their adult lives and when they have children. However there should always be some kind of healthy lifestyles and nutrition education in schools to keep reinforcing the habits and prevent the obesity chain to start again.

Overall, obesity is a problem worldwide and needs to be dealt with in the near future to prevent the continuous increase in the percentage of obese citizens all over the world. Chile is just part of the problem of obesity in the world and can be a start to the solution of fixing obesity. Using the tactics previously mentioned, we can cut down the amount of obesity in Chile and then reinforce similar tactics in other countries as well or learn from the programs used in Chile to find to actual best ways to prevent and stop obesity. Doing this is pertinent in making the world a healthier place for citizens of every country.

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