Title: The Children’s Health and Activity Modification Program (C.H.A.M.P.): Exploring the impact of a 4-week lifestyle intervention on obese children and their families

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Abstract:
EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF A 4-WEEK LIFESTYLE INTERVENTION ON OBESE CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES

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Purpose: C.H.A.M.P., a 4-week day camp for obese children aged 8-14, was held during August 2008. The program included daily physical activity, dietary, and behavioural modification for children, and similarly-themed educational sessions for family members on weekends. The purpose of the present study was to explore the experiences of children and family members who participated in C.H.A.M.P.. Methods: This qualitative study enlisted a trained facilitator to moderate five focus groups immediately following the intervention. Children (n = 12) were allocated to 1 of 2 groups; parents (n = 17) were allocated to 1 of 3 groups. Following a semi-structured interview guide, each session was digitally recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using inductive content analysis. Results: Preliminary analysis revealed that children enjoyed participating in physical activities progressively and felt that it got easier over time. Children reported that they felt more confident in themselves and their ability to try new activities; using positive self-talk and involving their families in healthy change were emphasized. Dietary themes for children included the importance of eating balanced meals, monitoring serving sizes, and moderation. Parents reported increased confidence in parenting skills, and greater awareness of their influence on family members. Goal setting, trust, and empowerment of children in decision making were also emphasized by parents. Conclusion: This pilot study offers unique insight into the perspectives of obese children and their families. Overall, the program was well-received and impacted participants positively. Results will be discussed in terms of their implications for continued program development and future implementation.

Keywords: childhood obesity; lifestyle intervention; diabetes prevention; physical activity

This poster was presented at the Health over the Life Course Conference held at the University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, October 14-16, 2009.
The Children’s Health and Activity Modification Program (C.H.A.M.P.)
Exploring the impact of a 4-week lifestyle intervention on obese children and their families

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PURPOSE

- To explore the experiences of children and family members who participated in C.H.A.M.P., a 4-week lifestyle intervention for obese children aged 8-14 and their families, held during August 2008
- The program included daily physical activity, dietary, and behaviour modification components for children, and similarly-themed educational sessions for family members on weekends

INTRODUCTION

- Approximately ⅓ of Canadian children and adolescents aged 2 to 17 years are overweight or obese1
- Contributors to this epidemic include decreased physical activity and poor diet
- Overweight and obese children are more likely to be obese adults and develop diseases at a much younger age than healthy weight children2
- It is important to intervene in childhood when lifestyle behaviours are amenable to modification
- Due to the special challenges that obese children face, it is important that individualized care is provided for both the child and his/her family3

METHODS

- A trained facilitator moderated five, semi-structured focus groups throughout the first two weeks of September, 2008
- Children (n = 12) were allocated to 1 of 2 groups based on C.H.A.M.P. “teams”; parents (n = 17) were allocated to 1 of 3 groups
- Participants were asked about their experiences at C.H.A.M.P., and specifically their physical activity and nutrition behaviours, perceptions on group dynamics, and self-esteem
- Each session was digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim
- Member checking4 occurred throughout each focus group to enhance the trustworthiness of the data
- Inductive content analysis independently by 2 researchers is ongoing; preliminary findings are presented below

FINDINGS

From the kids...

Preliminary findings show that:
- Children enjoyed participating in physical activities progressively and felt that it got easier over time
- They felt more confident in themselves, and their ability to try new activities and overcome challenges
- Distractions were important: if physical activity is fun there is less focus on the act itself
- Using positive self-talk and involving their families in healthy change were important
- Dietary themes for children included the importance of eating balanced meals, following Canada’s Food Guide, monitoring serving sizes, and moderation

SELECTED QUOTATIONS

From the kids...

“…I discovered that I actually do have a willingness inside of me that I never really showed before.”

“I don’t watch as much TV.”

“Just because it’s healthy, doesn’t mean its got to taste bad.”

From the parents...

“…my son runs everywhere now… I’ve started running… and he’s gone running with me on weekends too!”

“…my son runs everywhere now… I’ve started running… and he’s gone running with me on weekends too!”

“Eat in moderation!”

“…”...Now-a-days I’m gonna start doing squats and jumping on the spot when I watch my TV.”

DISCUSSION

- Limited research exists that examines psychological factors (e.g., self-esteem) and the role of the family with respect to promoting behaviour change and success in the treatment and management of childhood obesity5
- The present qualitative study has provided an evidence base regarding the views of participants and families; these may serve to inform future interventions targeting childhood obesity6
- Based on our findings, C.H.A.M.P. appears to have a positive effect on both children and family members

CONCLUSION

Overall, the program was well-received and participants felt positively about their experiences; a larger study with more participants (n=25) occurred in August 2009. Analysis is ongoing; preliminary findings are revealing experiences and themes similar to those found in 2008.

REFERENCES

6 This ongoing research is supported by The Lawson Foundation (Diabetes Funding Opportunity)
7 Presentation of this research has been supported by the Institute of Human Development, Child and Youth Health; a division of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research