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Mexico, Obesity

**Mexico Combats Obesity**

**1. Introduction**

Mexico is struggling with an ongoing health crisis affecting ⅓ of the population, contributing to a 39.2% mortality rate. Children and adults alike become more obese as years pass, and trends are increasing. In the past 20 years, the percentage of obesity and overweight in Mexico has increased by 10% leading to a total of 70% obesity in the population. Advertising and big corporations are not helping trends either. They are causing a surplus of unhealthy food in abhorrent amounts to be disturbed and sold to various stores nationwide. Many solutions come to mind, and these solutions are meant to incentivize people to better themselves and allow for proper nutrition, incorporate certain customs into the culture like food, and raise awareness through certain outlets like social media, the news, and even government advertisements. Creating an app to allow healthy food recipes to be enjoyed and made with ease using ingredients readily available would lead to a significant impact with a small investment.

**2. Country Facts**

There are 128 million people living in Mexico as of 2023. About 16 million people live in rural Mexico, as opposed to 112 million living in urban areas. Mexico (Aka) The United Mexican States is a federation. It has a democratic and republican-based presidential system following its constitution of 1917. Mexico has three branches of government, similar to America, which has a legislative, executive, and judicial branch. Mexico has 13.2% of land cultivated, a little over 100,000 square miles of land. The average farm size is about 45 acres, that's about 22 soccer fields. Mexico’s principal crops are maize (corn), with about $3,000,000,000 in production; wheat, with $800,000,000 in production; and soybeans, with $1,900,000,000 in production. Dairy products and meat products such as poultry, beef, and pork, with about $3,400,000,000 in production as of 2021. Mexico’s climate and geography are very diverse, and the climate varies from desert to tropical. There are deserts, mountains, and plateaus in the desert. These factors allow for a large variety of crops to be cultivated.

**3. Family life**

The average family in Puebla, Mexico, consists of 4 people; typically, houses are made of stone wood, concrete, and sheet metal fitted for roofs. The diet of a typical person: corn tortilla, beans, chiles, rice, pork and chicken. Most of the diet seems healthy, but how it's cooked results in it being unhealthy, mainly through excessive oil, salt, and sugar. Most food comes from local markets or their own gardens and orchards. Families cook food with gas stoves, ovens, or charcoal grills. In Puebla, there is an abundance of jobs in varied fields; the average job you might find yourself is support workers in agriculture 8.4% with an average salary of 9.3k annually, followed by sales employees and dispatchers and depend on trade, next in line traders in stores. Families have access to education and health care, but the quality and affordability do vary heavily on income. There are public and private schools, as well as, more recently telesecundaria (distance education). Health centers, clinics, and pharmacies exist, but some people may prefer traditional medicine or home remedies. Most areas have access to toilets and other bare necessities as well as public places, like parks and recreational centers for kids although a lot of them lack other superficial things like solar panels or access to wind energy. Most of the water is also collected from nearby rivers and man-made rivers; drinking water is transported in large jugs to houses that buy water. Some barriers that families face consist of making enough money to survive, mainly because Mexico's poverty rate is 44%. Many Mexicans live in a situation that leaves them with limited income. Also, the abundance of cheap, readily available junk food such as soda chips and food cooked in various unhealthy ways does not help their situation.

**4. Challenge and Impact**

One in three adults are morbidly obese, and 2 in 3 ages 15 and up are either obese or overweight in Mexico. Obesity has had an overall increase from the 2000s to the modern day by a total of 10%. This epidemic has cost the Mexican government over 240 billion pesos(about 14 billion USD) a year. Although attempts have been made to try to alleviate this problem, in most cases, it has proven to be ineffective; trends are worsening each year. Constant advertising of junk food influences trends. Easy access to convenience stores and other venues allows for easy distribution and an abundance of cheap junk food. Other factors, such as income, can also influence trends. Rural areas are not as affected as urban ones; they have easy access to fresher food, such as vegetables and fruits. Urban populations, on the other hand are more susceptible to certain advertising techniques as well as more stores selling these nonnutritious foods. Obesity is now looked at as commonplace in Mexico with such high rates it is not uncommon to see children struggling with obesity. Men and women deal with this at a different rate. Men have an obesity rate of 32% with an overweight rate of 41%; women have a higher rate of obesity at 41% and an overweight rate of 35.8%. Children have an obesity rate of 36.9%, with an overweight rate of 37.8%.

**5. Solutions**

Certain solutions come to mind, such as an app that allows for food recommendations based on what is common and cheap in the region or advertising through major media outlets. Major strengths include reaching a large audience, can be incorporated into daily life easily and doesn't require a huge amount of money to start it up. Certain people may not have access to phones or television, but a large number of people have access to radios, be it public or personal, in public transport and even in private transportation. Access to a radio will provide another means for the public to be informed about healthy eating and cooking. In 2020, the Mexican state Oaxaca banned the sale of junk food to children; Lawmaker Magaly Lopez Dominguez(part of the legislative branch) passed a law that would force street vendors and stores to not sell to children. This also extended to vending machines in schools. This was done to curb the obesity rates for children. The Island of Nauru has the highest obesity rate in the world; it has an obesity rate of 61%, with an overweight rate of 90%; some solutions proposed by Naura were simple exercise, mainly walking around the island’s international airport perimeter( about 3 miles)not only this but also organized sports such as Australian football, soccer and weight lifting developed by Nauran health authorities. Singapore has one of the lowest obesity rates, with a 10 percent obesity rate and a 36% overweight rate. Some solutions that Singapore introduced are health education campaigns for awareness of the risk of obesity, healthy and nutritious meals established in schools, as well as a national fitness program called the Steppe program; most of these solutions would meet most of the needs in my country. Firstly, Mexico already has a great variety of fruits, vegetables and animal products to choose from. Another solution is an app that allows for meals to be prepared based on healthy, cheap ingredients within a region of the country. For example, in areas where staple foods like nopales or leafy vegetables like quelites are available, recipes would be provided that would focus on healthy ways to prepare foods. Depending on the area and which foods are readily available and currently being used it would list additional foods that can have nutritious benefits and are inexpensive. Ad campaigns can and will also help; some main talking points to discuss how obesity negatively affects the body, how obesity is a leading cause for an increase in death in the country, as well as other topics about its increase towards heart disease and other health-related diseases such as diabetes. These programs and talks can be run on the radio or television. For younger teens who may not avidly listen to the radio or do not care for television, social media can be a great alternative to this. Over 90 % of the population has a cell phone, and of this 90%, over 74% of the population of Mexico is currently using social media in one form or another, not just teens but a variety of ages ranging from 4 and up. With this being said, advertising, like in Singapore, with its programs, is meant to educate in schools and as a warning to the public. In America when advertisers focused on getting the public to drink more milk. They used popular celebrities with milk mustaches to influence the younger generation to drink more milk. Something similar can be done with celebrities in Mexico.

These initiatives can be easily funded by the government and save the government money. The results of the obesity epidemic already cost the Mexican government roughly around 240 billion pesos a year in medical-related expenses. It is relatively inexpensive to add to the current governmental budget. President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador has been making reforms such as education reform and adding social programs to help kids get scholarships and train for jobs. On top of these, President Obrador has been running several projects. This could be a great campaign to bring future politicians even better notoriety and also help out the country with the ongoing dilemma without the influence of outside powers. Community members could help by spreading awareness about obesity’s harmful effects. The government would be the main driving force, with advertisements, school health reform, and education, and even if not entirely the government, anyone with developer skills in app creation could be hired by the government to create the app. The creation of the app would help with meal preparation or even use social media to share awareness or even healthy recipes to combat obesity. Certain cultural norms would have to be considered as well, like how food is already cooked differently, and even though unhealthy people can view this as standard, the distribution of junk food is common. Most people don’t have any reason to feel justified giving it up, with Coke being so popular that children start drinking it before they're even three years old. Things should start off at a slow pace and slowly build up to create a safer feeling for changes in Mexico. In terms of sustainability, this project would need help from not just the community of Mexico but also its government to help raise awareness and allow for this project in the long term to remain strong and a part of Mexico as a whole.

**6. Conclusion**

In conclusion, obesity in Mexico needs urgent attention and requires concerted efforts to allow for the implementation of practical solutions. One-third of the population is affected by obesity. With rates soaring over the past 20 years, this problem has reached unprecedented levels with significant threats to the public and to the economy. Despite the many challenges posed by other factors, such as advertising, easy access to unhealthy food, and income challenges, there is hope for a chance to eradicate this problem. Certain solutions, like developing an app for healthier recipes and the widespread use of advertising through many outlets, offer a chance to raise awareness and promote better nutrition. Through the insight of other nations such as Nauru and Singapore and the use of existing infrastructure, Mexico can take one of many steps to combat obesity. By allowing community members to use government resources and address social and cultural norms, sustainability can be achieved in the long run. Tackling this epidemic requires a multifaceted approach, from education to policy changes and social shifts. With effort and determination, Mexico can work toward a brighter, healthier future where nutrition can be a staple and obesity rates decline.

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