



## Nutrition and physical activity in schools in Pacific Island Countries

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The increasing rates of obesity among children and adolescents are significant issues worldwide and in the Pacific Island Nations<sup>(1)</sup>. An energy imbalance between calorie intake and expenditure is linked to overweight and obesity for children and adolescents. Epidemiological, nutritional, and technological changes are linked to altered eating habits, including an increase in energy consumption. Conversely, technological advancements and market globalization are responsible for declines in physical activity (PA)<sup>(2)</sup>. During COVID-19 outbreak a more sedentary lifestyle than before the outbreak has been adopted by children and adolescents as a result of lockdown measures, which include shutting of schools, restrictive travel outside the home, and limiting social interactions has made the issue worse<sup>(3)</sup>. Studies have shown that 40% to 70 % of obese children become obese adults<sup>(4)</sup>. Since children spend a large portion of their day in school and eat their main meals there, school settings are suitable for interventions aimed at preventing childhood obesity. Additionally, school environments will reduce the number of dropouts brought on by problems with accessibility or transit<sup>(5)</sup>. The selection of primary school children is important for interventions as the dietary and physical activity habits acquired at this age are ingrained in children and continue into adulthood. So, it is important to have a robust nutrition and physical activity curriculum in all the primary schools. There are many challenges faced by the governments in implementing such curriculum which includes lack of trained in country staff, limited infrastructures in schools for physical activity, culturally relevant information which can be easily understood by local populations, proper monitoring, and evaluation of the existing guidelines. Community engagement and partnership with local health ministries and departments are crucial for the success of these curriculum<sup>(6)</sup>. To fill this gap robust evidence on effectiveness and implementation of school-based wellness intervention programs in primary schools are in dire needs in Pacific Island nations. Given this, the project titled “Healthy Child Promising Future-Promoting health in primary school settings was conducted in all schools in Wallis & Futuna and piloted in one urban school in Fiji. A knowledge, attitude, practice (KAP) questionnaire was used to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention which was conducted for all the children (7-9 years) and their care takers. Intervention was conducted on 15 pre identified themes by face-to-face sessions every week and 30 minutes physical activity session was conducted every day in all the schools for children. For caretakers intervention was conducted around 5 themes. In both the countries the intervention had shown significant improvement in KAP scores both for caretakers and children related to the healthy diet consumption and promotion of physical activity. The results indicate that the developed intervention package had a positive impact on KAP.

### References

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