

## ADDRESSING CHILD OBESITY VIA SOCIAL NETWORKS: EXPERIENCE REPORT OF ACTIONS OF THE HEALTHY LIFESTYLE PROJECT AT SCHOOL IN THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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**Abstract:** Childhood obesity is a nutritional disorder considered a serious public health problem worldwide because it is responsible for a large part of the emergence of chronic-degenerative diseases and, consequently, raises the levels of morbidity and mortality. The beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to the increase in the rates of this comorbidity, as the established transmission containment measures led to a reduction in physical activity, an increase in screen time and anxiety-related disorders. Thus, the Healthy Lifestyle at School extension project, developed at the Faculty of Medicine of the Federal University of Cariri (UFCA), whose objective is to act in the identification, prevention and treatment of overweight and obesity in children and adolescents, recognized the need adapting face-to-face activities to the remote context. An account was created on the social network Instagram in order to alert about the problem and with the objective of reaching the target audience through educational, preventive and control measures against childhood obesity. The study is a qualitative analysis, of the experience report type, based on data obtained between April and September of the year 2020 on the Project's social media page. It can be seen from this study that the challenge for extension projects to remain as guides for good health practices and remote knowledge production showed satisfactory results with the use of the social network as a tool for health promotion and education.

**Keywords:** Childhood Obesity. University Extension. COVID-19.

## INTRODUCTION

Obesity is a chronic inflammatory disease characterized by excessive accumulation of body fat in adipose tissue. It is conditioned by numerous factors, especially the imbalance between energy intake and expenditure,

reduced physical activity and sedentary lifestyle (CABRERA, et al., 2014).

It is estimated that 7.3% of Brazilian children are obese (UN, 2017) and, due to the series of early and late repercussions (OLIVEIRA, 2017), childhood obesity represents a major public health problem worldwide by increasing morbidity and mortality rates. (CORICA D, et al., 2019).

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (LI ET AL., 2020; GUO ET AL., 2020), the established transmission containment measures (WHO, 2020) led to reduced physical activity, increased screen time and anxiety-related disorders and, consequently, the increase in obesity rates globally (DA SILVA ARAÚJO et al. 2019).

Since preventing childhood obesity leads to a decrease in the incidence of chronic-degenerative diseases and interventions aimed at children and adolescents are useful in this regard, the need for simple, economic and remote interventions was strengthened. Neto et al., (2018), demonstrated satisfactory results with the use of the social network as a tool for health promotion and education. In this context, the Healthy Lifestyle at School Extension Project, whose objective is to act in the identification, prevention and treatment of overweight and obesity in children and adolescents, recognized the need to adapt to the use of social networks in order to alert about the problem and reduce the rates of excess weight.

## METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative study, of the experience report type, based on data obtained between April and September of the year 2020 on the social media page of the Healthy Lifestyle at School extension project, developed at the Faculty of Medicine of the Federal University do Cariri (UFCA), with support from the Dean of Extension of the respective university.

An account was created on the social network Instagram with the objective of reaching the target audience, mainly the community of the Escola de Ensino Fundamental Senador Martiniano de Alencar, Barbalha - Ceará, through educational, preventive and control measures against childhood obesity.

Searches are carried out for materials of scientific relevance in the current literature with a theme related to childhood obesity, as well as experts from various areas of knowledge are invited to contribute.

Using a playful and easy-to-understand way, the materials are prepared and edited with the help of platforms and graphic design programs (Canva and Adobe Premiere), resulting in textual materials and videos with an average duration of 1 to 5 minutes.

Posts occur once or twice a week after careful review, seeking to use all network tools, such as feed (permanent posts on the main page), *stories* (publications accessible for only 24 hours) and IGTV (videos).

In addition, as a way of democratizing information, complementary materials are also made available to the posts through a data storage platform (Google Drive) with a link available in the profile of the social network used.

## RESULTS

The virtual page on Instagram was created on April 17, 2020. Until the second week of October of the same year, 107 posts were made, with 79 *stories*, 22 feed posts and 6 IGTVs, and 177 followers were counted.

In general, the posts addressed the themes of: 1. presentation of the project, its members and previous actions; 2. risk factors and consequences of childhood obesity; 3. obesity diagnosis; 4. behavioral, pharmacological and surgical treatment measures and their indications; 5. healthy eating; 6. practice of

physical activity; 7. preventive measures in general.

Interactions through Instagram enabled the Project to expand its activities beyond the target school, reaching the cities of Barbalha - CE (25% of followers), Juazeiro do Norte - CE (24%), Crato - CE (8, 8%), Fortaleza - CE (19%) and São Paulo - SP (3.1%). Table 1 shows how this interaction with the public took place during this period.

On the other hand, it can be pointed out that some limitations were found, such as the difficulty of accessing the internet for a large part of the students of the target school, a fact that made it impossible for there to be virtual meetings with this audience and a greater interaction on social networks by them.

Variable (n)	Average ( $\pm$ DP <sup>1</sup> )
Likes per post on <i>feed</i> (n=28)	12,75 ( $\pm$ 4,24)
Video views on IGTV (n=6)	69,17 ( $\pm$ 16,33)
Reach <sup>2</sup> per <i>feed</i> post for the last 10 weeks (n=10)	50,65 ( $\pm$ 53,37)

<sup>1</sup> Standard deviation. <sup>2</sup> Number of individuals who viewed the content.

Table 1 – Extension Project account metrics on Instagram.

Source: Prepared by the authors (2020).

## CONCLUSIONS

In general, the new reality of extension actions has created new paradigms for the community, extension workers and universities with the emergence of the challenge that extension projects remain as guides for good health practices and remote knowledge production.

With this new operating proposal, the members of the Project have the opportunity to remain inserted in an active means of social transformation, so that, in addition to working in health promotion and disease

prevention, they undergo an enriching experience for technical and social training. in the academic scope of the UFCA Medicine Course, which increases the university's notoriety as a training entity for qualified and engaged professional-citizens in the midst of the society in which they live.

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