Did You Wash Your Hands? – Asian Countries to US Means To Prevent Communicable Disease

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**Thesis:**

Hand washing is a universal language in most places, however clearly certain countries are doing better than others. Which in the process is can lead to numerous health problems for the community.

**Introduction:**

From a historic perspective handwashing was viewed as a means of personal hygiene or cultural habit. It was not until years later where scientists began taking a look to see how this practice connected with the spreading a germs. Ignaz Semmelweis is noted with providing the first evidence showing that the benefits of hand hygiene within the medical profession. He noted this important health practice when he discovered that the incidences of puerperal fever could be dramatic reduced with hand disinfection practices prior to assisting and a practice and before seeing a new one (*WHO*, 2009). Not a long time later Florence Nightingale would make her make her mark in the field of hand hygiene. Her work during the Crimean War debunk the myth that infections were brought upon by a foul odor, but rather non-present hand sanitation practices. It was not until the 1980 when the CDC launched its first national endorsement of hand hygiene guidelines in response to a series of foodborne outbreaks connected to improper handwashing practices (The Global Public-Private Partnership for Handwashing, 2015). Fast-forwarding to modern times, for many of us handwashing is a skill that has been engrained in our minds since a very young age. The CDC refers to handwashing as a kind of “do it yourself” vaccine. Having access, opportunity and knowledge of how to properly wash your hands affords individuals the chance to keep themselves healthy, but also from spreading illnesses to other people. However this common and somewhat routine health practice here in the United States, is not the case in other locations around the world (CDC, 2016).

**Background:**

Getting people to properly wash their hands is a problem both in the United States and in various Asian countries. However they differ in the reasoning and outside factors that are

 CDC, 2016

making efforts more difficult. For Asian communities it is more of a knowledge barrier as well as a means of access. They aren’t fully educated of the major benefits of handwashing and how it is to be regularly and consistently practiced. Handwashing’s other challenge is being looked at as an afterthought. Especially for those older members in the community, the skill of handwashing was never taught to them and therefore that same “ignorance” of the unknown is passed down to the next generation (Fantz, 2011) . It is also important to take into consideration the means of access to soap and water within these Asian communities. This is due in part because in these portions of the world economic means are not at their highest, a “luxury” such as soap may not be something that families can afford. And those who do may not do so in correct manner, omit to doing so before or after certain task or simply skip the task altogether.

While in the United States there is somewhat of reverse mindset. For most of we have been taught how and when we should wash our hands and the many benefits of doing such as practice. Yet, so many of us choose not to do so. So the challenge to addressing this issue is that people don’t fully understand how to properly wash their hands to extend that they should. There’s also a means of being lazy or feeling as though that it is not an important step to take. They also may not be aware of the possible repercussions of repeatedly choosing to not wash your hands and the kinds of problems that they can be more susceptible too (Friedman, 2013).

**Health Implications:**

The ramifications for not using good hand hygiene spans far beyond the person using improper practices, it provides the opportunity for a slew of people to be impacted as well. In an everyday context handwashing helps to prevent us from getting sick on regular bases and spreading germs to one another. In order to see the larger ramification of not having strong health practices in place, think about the numerous instances in which one should wash your hands. Whether that is before or completing a certain act such touching garbage, after using the restroom, before eating a meal or before taking care of a wound. The CDC highlights that washing ones hands with soap and water has the ability to lower diarrheal disease associated death by 50%. It also can reduce the chance of contracting respiratory infections by 16%. Handwashing not only produces facts such as this, but it also helps to prevent the spreads of foodborne disease outbreaks. Whether that be within a restaurant, local fast food stop or in our own kitchens. Handwashing saves lives and if we were to all do our part millions of lives a year (CDC, 2013). For some areas of our planet such as Asia, where handwashing is not something routinely practiced or heavily reinforced, statistics such as these continue to be a reality for their community. Which is unfortunate especially because it does not have to be. Various factors and circumstances such as access to correct materials, proper instruction and funds to sustain the practices, than regardless of how many benefits handwashing presence it won’t be implemented to its truest capacity.

**Methodology**

The UN has also released various information regarding the benefits of handwashing on a global health sphere. One instance where the power handwashing can be seen is through Hurricane Karina. Due to the storm various sanitation measures were destroyed, allowing for acute diarrhea as well as cholera in places where it never previously existed. And it was worse because the area was already facing so many other health issues.There has information handwashing with soap before meals and after toileting can reduced diarrheal infections by 40%. (UN News Centre, 2016). The WHO is also joining the efforts to improve hand hygiene practices around the world. There initiative “WHO Saves Lives, Clan Your Hands,” stresses the importance of medical personnel to sustain and regular practice hand hygiene. This program has been put into place because research has seen that there is a positive correlation between proper handwashing in medical facilities and the reduction in the spread of infectious disease (UN News Centre, 2016). A majority of the information that has been collected about the benefits of handwashing on one’s health have been through research and experiments, such as case studies or interventions of programs. Interviews and observations are also a popular means of understanding not only hand washing, but how hygiene plays a general plays within various communities around the world. We are in such close contact with each other and handle so many things on a daily bases, that the simple and easy practice of hand washing can prevent so many diseases, especially in the underdeveloped world. Above all things lives are saved through handwashing, it is that simple (UN News Centre, 2016).

**First supporting case/example:**

 A study conducted in 2013 by Michigan State University professor Carl Borchgrevink looked to see how effective people really washed their hands. In this observational study Borchgrevink along with 12 other researchers observed over 3,700 bathroom goers in a college town in Michigan. Some of the statistics from the study found that 5% of people was their hands enough to kill germs after using the bathroom. 33% of participants don’t use soap during their cleaning process and 10% skip handwashing all together. Some other major findings of the study was that compared to younger people, older people wash their hands more often and more thoroughly. Men were less likely to wash their hands thoroughly than their female counterparts. Time of day was also noted as a factor in people’s hand washing process. Individuals were more likely to wash their hands towards the beginning of the day compared to the end (Borchgrevink, 2013).

 The study delves into as why in such a developed country like the United States people are choosing to skip this important health practice. It noted that is a mixture of things. People feel that it is not important and that it doesn’t apply to them. So don’t fully understand the benefits that reaped if handwashing is done correctly. There’s also a matter of convenience. If something requires an extra step or impacts our everyday way of doing things we are less likely to do them, regardless of their benefits.

**Second supporting case/example:**

A study published in 2014 looked into the oral and hand behaviors and the risk factors among school age children in Southeast Asian countries. Four major Asian countries were focused on within this study, India, Indonesia, Myanmar and Thailand. The sample population encompassed a total of 13,824 students whose age ranged from 13 to 15 years old. The study also included a multivariate analysis, male gender, health risk behaviors and lack of protective factors were associated with sub-optimal tooth brushing, lower socioeconomic status, health risk behaviors, psychological distress and lack of protective factors were found to be associated with sub-optimal hand washing hygiene behavior. Data for this research study was collected using questionaries’ or self-reporting done by the children in these countries. Due to there being a lack of information on the prevalence of and relationship between oral and hand hygiene, this study hoped to shed some light on this particular group of at risk populations. Researchers of this study collected their information through secondary analysis of the Global School-Based Health Survey (GSHS) from the four Southeast Asian countries. Various socioeconomic status factors were included and factored in when collected data such as income, how many years they’ve attended school, were they live and access to improved sanitation. There were four question posed on the questionnaire Oral and hand hygiene behavior was assessed with four questions. “During the past 30 days, how many times per day did you usually clean or brush your teeth?” Response options were ranked a 1- 6 range scale. “During the past 30 days, how often did you wash your hands before eating?” “…after using the toilet or latrine?” and “…how often did you use soap when washing your hands?” Response were then ranked on a 1-5 response scale. (Peltzer, 2014).

UNICEF, 2006

 Of the 13,824 children polled, 51.2% were male and 48.8% female. The data collected showed that Thai school children did not always wash their hands before eating (65.9%) and with soap (67.0%), which was more frequently than in any other country, while Indonesian school children were the poorest in washing hands after toilet (34.6%). Among the four study countries Myanmar was the best in hand washing before meals and washing hands with soap compared to the other three countries. Overall results showed 22.4% of school children reported sub-optimal oral hygiene (<twice a day tooth brushing), 45.2% did not always wash their hands before meals, 26.5% after toileting and 59.8% washing their hands with soap (59.8%) (Peltzer, 2014).

**Analysis:**

 A consensus that can be made from both studies is that there is a lack of education and regular practicing of handwashing by the public. For those in Asian countries, handwashing is something that is not regularly practiced within in the community. And with that neither are its benefits. Whereas in the U.S. it is commonly practiced and taught throughout our cultural practices, yet even though we recognize its benefits we still fall short of quality practice. There is another area in which these two spheres of the world are also similar is the manner in which they focused on children. They both see the extreme benefits of teaching children these practices so early in life. By doing so they hope they will continue using these practice later in life.

**Solutions:**

Various solutions methods as a means of trying to resolve this health care issue. However, in both studies the importance of education was expressed. It is one of the most classic but also one of the most effective ways to get people to understand how changing their current behavior can be of such benefit to them. It is also important to take into consideration who would be the best population to target with this information. Many of the initiative found in research are focused on children, particularly those in school and finding ways to get them excited about washing their hands. This is in part due to the fact that school is such an integral part of so many of the skills that we carry over into adulthood. Within developing countries there is also the level of focus imparting this knowledge to the females within the communities. They often time do many of the household chores and care for infants and other members of their family as well as their communities (UNICEF, 2003). Having them educated could also help to prevent the spread of various germs and disease because they do interact with so many things and people on a regular bases. In the setting of the United States the similar principles able. A variety of program across the country target school age children trying to teach them the importance of handwashing. While trying to make it engaging and fun so that it is more remember and increases the likelihood of people practiced outside of an educational setting. There’s also the point of getting adults and professional staff to better use their hand hygiene practices. A study showed that was increase in handwashing when individuals were monitored and feedback of some kind was given. Though monitoring and regular feedback may not be able to be implemented in the moment it presents the idea that change is possible when brought to someone’s attention (McGuckin, 2009). Major governmental health agencies also have training course as well as global initiatives to try and encourage people to be active participants in keeping themselves and others healthy (CDC, 2016).

 CDC, 2016

**Conclusions:**

In looking at all of these efforts in comparison to where we started it gives me hope for the future. Handwashing is such as simple process that doesn’t take much time and its impacts can such an impact on our health. It is important for countries such as the U.S. to not take this practice lightly and truly appreciate the level of meaning and knowledge that so many of us possess. And for our developing countries around the world it is important for us a global community to raise awareness and teach these skills and it process save so many lives that don’t have to be lost.

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