Abstract

This study investigated the body image perceptions among adolescents in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE). A cross-sectional survey was conducted amongst 661 adolescents (324 males; 337 females) aged 12-17 years selected from government schools using a multistage stratified random sampling technique. A pretested validated questionnaire was employed to determine the perception of adolescents toward their weight status. A nine figure silhouette illustration was used to measure perceptions of their ideal body image and how it compares with their current body weight. The results revealed that overweight (18.5%) and obesity (27.2%) were higher among males than in females (13.1% and 20.5% respectively). A high proportion of overweight males and females considered themselves as average (45.0% and 52.3%, respectively). Similarly, 56.9% of obese male and 46.4% of females considered themselves as average weight. Of non-overweight/obese males and females, 27.6% and 39.3% respectively, were pressured by parents to gain weight (p > 0.000). In general overweight and obese adolescents were more likely to face pressure from their parents and teased by friends than non-overweight/obese adolescents. Compared to their current body image, overweight and obese adolescents chose a significantly lighter figure as their ideal (p < 0.000). It is suggested that the current health education curriculum should include information related to healthy body weight and appropriate diet and lifestyle so as to minimize risk of developing distorted body image concerns in adolescence and beyond.

Keywords

Adolescents, Perception, Ideal body weight, Current body weight, UAE.