

Prevalence and Awareness of Obesity Among Emerging Healthcare Professionals Aged 18-25: A Cross-Sectional Study

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the prevalence and awareness of obesity among emerging healthcare professional students at Dr. D Y Patil College, Pimpri. Using a cross-sectional design, data were collected through a structured questionnaire. The findings reveal the prevalence of overweight and obesity and examine students' awareness regarding associated health risks, lifestyle factors, and preventive measures. Insights gained from this study aim to inform health promotion strategies within educational institutions. A cross-sectional study was conducted among emerging healthcare professional students at Dr. D Y Patil College, Pimpri. Participants included students enrolled in BDS, MBBS, BAMS, BHMS, BPT, and Nursing programs. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire, which comprised sections on demographics, anthropometric measurements (such as height, weight, and BMI awareness), awareness of obesity-related health risks, lifestyle factors, and knowledge of preventive measures. The survey reveals key lifestyle and health trends, highlighting both efforts and areas for improvement. While many manage stress (37.7%) and seek healthy eating information (34.3%), there are concerns about high fast-food intake (46.7%), sedentary behaviour (34.3%), and low physical activity (29.5%). Screen time and sleep patterns need attention. Fruit and vegetable intake is moderate, but sugary drinks and late-night eating show mixed results. Awareness of BMI is good (36.8%), though 34.1% feel that weight management information is lacking. Many acknowledge the negative health impact of weight (26.4%) but do not monitor it regularly (36.1% neutral). Increased awareness and resources are seen as crucial for better weight management and healthcare support.

Keywords: Obesity, BMI, Overweight, Awareness, Prevalence, Healthcare Professionals

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Introduction

Obesity is a global public health problem with major implications for health and the economy. It is a priority in many countries, requiring immediate action for prevention and management. Several life stages contribute to weight gain, including the transition from adolescence to adulthood (1).

The increasing rates of obesity have become a major public health concern worldwide. This condition, characterized by excessive fat accumulation that threatens health, now impacts nearly one in three adults globally, with more than two in five classified as obese. About one in eight people suffer from obesity, while 2.5 billion adults are overweight. These figures highlight the pressing need for

specific interventions, especially among young adults aged 18 to 25, a critical group experiencing significant lifestyle changes (2).

Over the past few decades, global dietary patterns have shifted, leading to a rise in the consumption of foods rich in fat and sugars, alongside increased physical inactivity due to sedentary work, modern transportation, and urbanization. The World Health Organization (WHO) first recognized obesity as a disease in 1948. By 2030, approximately 58% of the global population—3.3 billion people—could be affected by obesity (2).

The students, who will become future healthcare professionals, have a vital role in promoting healthy lifestyles and preventing obesity-related issues. By

encouraging healthy habits early on, they can help reduce the overall impact of obesity on individuals and the healthcare system (3).

Methods

Approval was taken from the college's ethical committee. Participants fulfilling the inclusion criteria were asked to fill out the consent form and questionnaire, which included demographic details. Post-questionnaire values were analysed, and data analysis was performed.

Prevalence of Overweight & Obesity: The observed prevalence rates of overweight and obesity (31.69% & 28.81%) among students are consistent with global trends that show a rising burden of these conditions among young adults. This demographic, transitioning from adolescence to adulthood, is particularly vulnerable to weight gain due to lifestyle changes such as increased academic pressure, reduced physical activity, and unhealthy dietary habits. The findings underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions aimed at promoting healthy behaviours within educational institutions. This study provides valuable insights into the lifestyle, dietary habits, weight management efforts, and body awareness among respondents, identifying both positive behaviours and areas of concern.

RESULTS

LIFESTYLE & DIETARY HABITS

Questions	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Fast food is regularly consumed by you.	0.4%	12.5%	37.9%	46.7%	2.9%
At least 3 servings of fruits and vegetables are consumed by you daily.	3.4%	18.7%	31.9%	40.9%	6%
Regular physical exercise	3.8%	26.6%	33.3%	29.5%	8%

or sports are engaged in by you.					
More than 6 hours a day are spent sitting (e.g., studying, working, using electronic devices)	3.4%	15.3%	31.4%	34.3%	15.7%
Sugary beverages are regularly consumed by you.	7.6%	27.4%	32.5%	24.9%	8%
Information about healthy eating and weight management is obtained by you from reliable sources.	5.5%	15.3%	30.9%	34.3%	14.4%
Sufficient sleep (more than 8	8.5%	18.2%	33.5%	28%	12.3%

Prevalence and Awareness of Obesity Among Emerging Healthcare Professionals Aged 18-25: A Cross-Sectional Study

hours) is received by you every day.					
Screen time is limited by you to avoid a sedentary lifestyle.	8.5%	21.6%	39%	23.7%	7.2%
Stress is actively managed by you through healthy coping mechanisms like exercise, meditation, or hobbies.	3.4%	19.5%	31.8%	37.7%	8.1%
Late-night eating or consuming high-calorie snacks before bed is avoided by you.	7%	14.4%	32.1%	32.1%	15.2%

The survey highlights key lifestyle and dietary habits among respondents. While many actively manage stress (37.7%) and seek healthy eating information (34.3%), concerns include high fast-food consumption (46.7%), sedentary behaviour

(34.3% sitting over 6 hours daily), and low physical activity (29.5%). Screen time management and sleep patterns need improvement. On the positive side, fruit and vegetable intake is moderate, though sugary beverage consumption and late-night eating show mixed trends. These findings emphasize the need for increased health awareness and lifestyle modifications.

WEIGHT MANAGEMENT EFFORTS & KNOWLEDGE

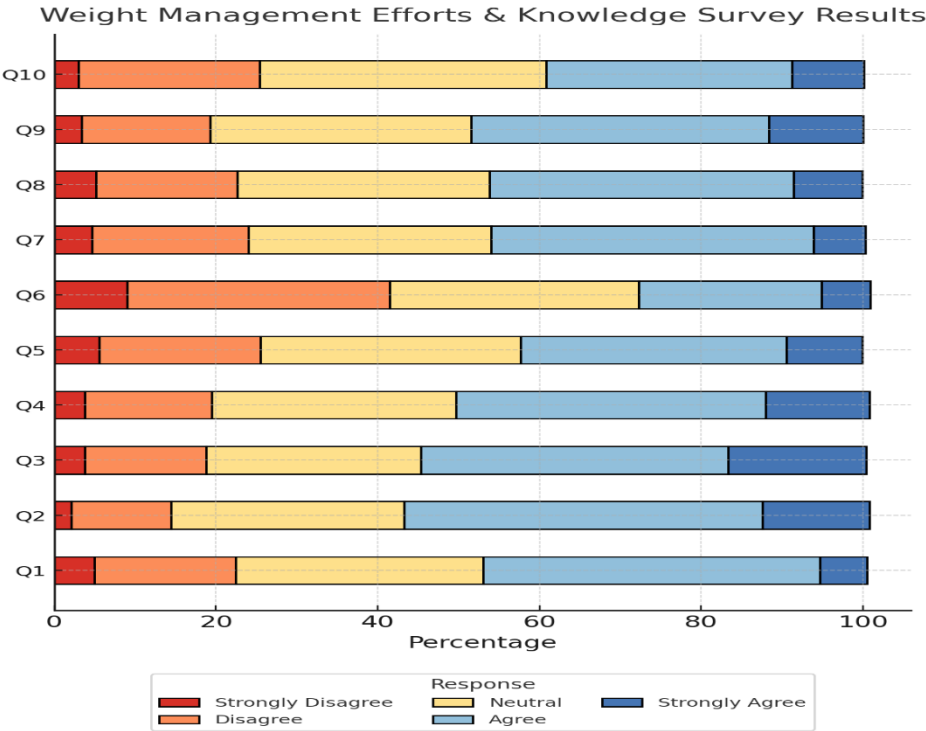
Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
A diagnosis of a weight-related health condition has been received by me.	5%	17.4%	30.6%	41.7%	5.8%
Efforts have been made by me to manage or change my weight in the past few years.	2.1%	12.3%	28.9%	44.3%	13.2%
Confidence in knowledge about healthy eating and weight management has been felt by me.	3.8%	15%	26.5%	38%	17.1%

Prevalence and Awareness of Obesity Among Emerging Healthcare Professionals Aged 18-25: A Cross-Sectional Study

Additional support or resources in managing my weight are believed to be beneficial by me.	3.8%	15.7%	30.2%	38.3%	12.8%
Significant factors causing delays in seeking treatment for obesity and overweight are recognized by me.	5.5%	20%	32.2%	32.8%	9.4%
Concern about being overweight or obese is felt by me.	9%	32.5%	30.8%	22.6%	6%
Specific goals related to managing my weight (e.g., losing, gaining, or maintaining) have been set by me.	4.7%	19.3%	30%	39.9%	6.4%

Tracking tools (e.g., mobile apps, journals) are used by me to monitor my diet and physical activity.	5.1%	17.5%	31.2%	37.6%	8.5%
Awareness of the role of portion control in managing my weight has been acknowledged by me.	3.4%	15.9%	32.2%	36.9%	11.6%
Professional guidance (e.g., dietitian, physiotherapist, or trainer) for managing my weight has been sought by me.	3%	22.4%	35.4%	30.4%	8.9%

Prevalence and Awareness of Obesity Among Emerging Healthcare Professionals Aged 18-25: A Cross-Sectional Study



The survey highlights efforts and knowledge regarding weight management. While many have made efforts to manage their weight (44.3%) and feel confident about healthy eating (38%), there is room for improvement in seeking professional guidance (30.4%) and using tracking tools (37.6%). A significant portion (41.7%) has been diagnosed with weight-related conditions, yet concern about being overweight remains low (22.6%). Most respondents recognize the role of portion control (36.9%) and believe additional support would be beneficial (38.3%). However, delays in treatment and mixed awareness of weight risks suggest the need for better resources and proactive strategies.

BODY AWARENESS & KNOWLEDGE

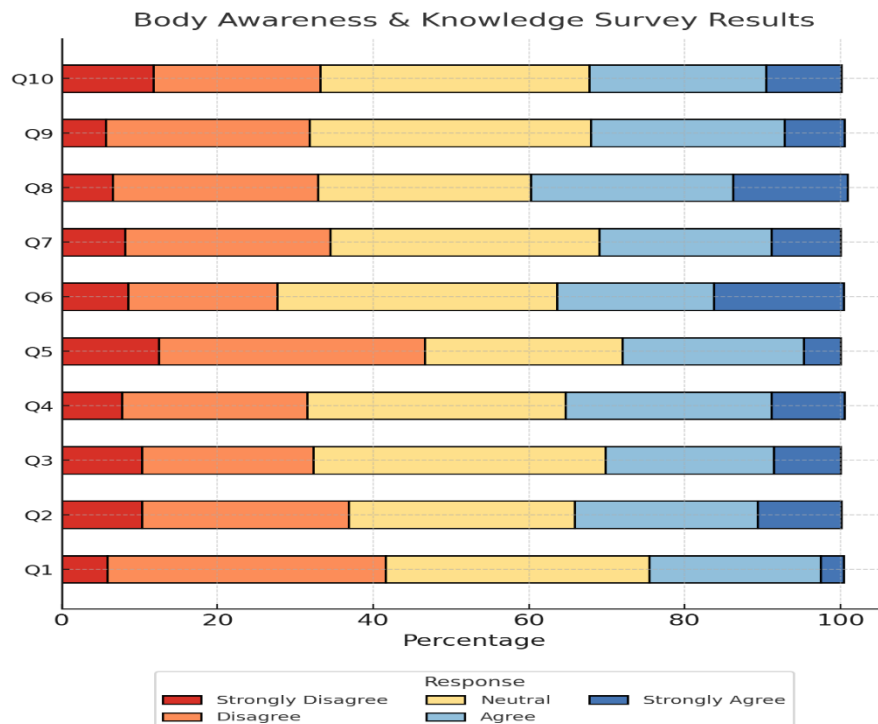
Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I believe my current weight is within a healthy range.	5.8%	35.8%	33.8%	22.1%	2.9%

Nutrition and physical fitness are equally important for my well-being.	10.3%	26.5%	29.1%	23.5%	10.7%
I feel confident about my own body image and weight.	10.3%	22%	37.5%	21.6%	8.6%
I believe my current weight negatively affects my	7.7%	23.8%	33.2%	26.4%	9.4%

Prevalence and Awareness of Obesity Among Emerging Healthcare Professionals Aged 18-25: A Cross-Sectional Study

overall health.					
I believe there is sufficient information available for young adults to manage their weight effectively.	12.5 %	34.1 %	25.4 %	23.3 %	4.7%
I am familiar with the term "BMI" (Body Mass Index).	8.5%	19.2 %	35.9 %	20.1 %	16.7 %
Lack of awareness about obesity and overweight contributes to delayed treatment.	8.1%	26.4 %	34.5 %	22.1 %	8.9%
Increased awareness would encourage	6.5%	26.4 %	27.3 %	26 %	14.7 %

people to seek healthcare are helpful for obesity or overweight issues.					
I regularly monitor my weight and BMI.	5.6%	26.2 %	36.1 %	24.9 %	7.7%
I believe maintaining a healthy weight is more important than physical appearance.	11.8 %	21.4 %	34.5 %	22.7 %	9.7%



A notable proportion of participants actively manage stress and seek reliable information about healthy eating, which are encouraging trends. However, significant challenges remain, including high fast food consumption, prolonged sedentary behavior, and inconsistent physical activity levels. These habits contribute to increased risks of overweight and obesity, emphasizing the urgent need to promote healthier routines. Interventions that encourage regular physical exercise, improved sleep patterns, and reduced screen time are essential to addressing

The survey highlights mixed body awareness and knowledge. While 22.1% believe their weight is healthy, 35.8% disagree, reflecting weight concerns. Nutrition and physical fitness are valued (34.2%), but confidence in body image is moderate (37.5% neutral). Awareness of BMI is fairly high (36.8%), though 34.1% feel that weight management information is insufficient. Many recognize their weight's negative health impact (26.4%), but show limited regular weight monitoring (36.1% neutral). Increased awareness is seen as a way to encourage healthcare professionals to help with obesity (40.7%), emphasizing the need for better resources and education.

Prevalence of Overweight & Obesity

The observed prevalence rates of overweight (31.69%) and obesity (28.81%) among students are consistent with global trends. This demographic, transitioning from adolescence to adulthood, is vulnerable to weight gain due to lifestyle changes such as increased academic pressure, reduced physical activity, and unhealthy dietary habits.

Awareness of Obesity-Related Risks and Preventive Measures

Awareness of obesity-related health risks, such as cardiovascular diseases and diabetes, was observed in 39.67% of the participants. Despite this awareness, only 35.54% reported engaging in regular physical activity, and 47.52% adhered to a balanced diet.

Several factors contribute to this gap, including academic responsibilities, time constraints, and lack of motivation. This highlights the importance of integrating practical health education into the curriculum, including interactive workshops and peer support programs.

these behaviors.

In the domain of weight management, while many respondents have made efforts to manage their weight and feel confident in their knowledge of healthy eating, the low uptake of professional guidance and minimal use of tracking tools suggest a gap in applying this knowledge effectively. Furthermore, despite the substantial percentage of individuals diagnosed with weight-related health conditions, a lack of concern about being overweight highlights a disconnect between awareness and action. Increased awareness of the role of portion control, alongside accessible and supportive resources, could bridge this gap and foster healthier behaviors.

The findings on body awareness reveal mixed perceptions among participants. While some believe their weight is within a healthy range, a significant portion disagrees, indicating concerns about weight-related health. Confidence in body image is moderate, with many respondents neutral on this aspect. Awareness of BMI is relatively high, yet many feel that information on effective weight management is lacking. Limited weight monitoring and delays in seeking treatment further point to the need for early intervention and awareness programs. Respondents' recognition of healthcare professionals as a potential approach for managing obesity and overweight issues highlights an opportunity to promote this underutilized resource. Overall, these findings underscore the need for comprehensive health education and targeted interventions. Strategies should focus on fostering balanced diets, regular physical activity, weight monitoring, and early professional guidance. Institutions and community organizations must play

a proactive role in increasing awareness and providing accessible resources to encourage long-term behavioral changes. Addressing these challenges holistically can help reduce the prevalence of overweight and obesity, ultimately enhancing the health and well-being of young adults.

Conclusion

The study reveals significant concerns regarding the prevalence of overweight and obesity among healthcare students, with a notable gap between awareness and practice. Many students struggle to adopt healthy behaviors due to barriers such as academic pressures, time constraints, and limited resources.

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