

Short Communication

Obesity among Medical Practitioners and Medical Students in Bahrain

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Data on weight and height (based on self-reporting) were obtained from 158 medical practitioners and 53 medical students were collected in 1999. Overweight and obesity was more observed in medical practitioners (44.3%) than medical students (22.6%).

The growing increase of obesity, among either adults or adolescents in Bahrain, creates a great incentive to study the prevalence and factors affecting this health problem in the community. Studies in the Arab Gulf countries, including Bahrain, have focused on the prevalence of obesity among children, adolescents and adults ^{1,2,3}. However, none of these studies have investigated the prevalence of obesity among health professionals. The aim of this short report is to ascertain the proportion of overweight and obesity among medical practitioners and medical students in Bahrain.

METHODS

Data of this paper are based on a cross-sectional survey to study nutrition knowledge, attitudes and practices of medical practitioners and medical students in Bahrain. Self-completion questionnaires were distributed to 300 medical practitioners and 100 medical students registered with the Ministry of Health and the Arabian Gulf University (AGU), respectively. The questionnaire included questions related to nutrition knowledge, attitudes and practices, and the subjects were asked to record their weight and height. The present study only reports the weight status of the subjects studied, based on body mass index [weight (Kg)/height (meter)²]. Of the total sample, 171 and 66 of medical practitioners and medical students respectively, returned the questionnaires, and among those, 158 and 53 respectively, recorded their weight and height,.

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Weight status was classified into 3 categories, underweight (BMI<20), normal (BMI 20-24.9) and overweight and obese (BMI≥25) as reported by Garrow ⁴.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The mean age of medical practitioners was 33.4±7.7 years, while that of medical students was 20.9±1.9 years. About 46% of medical practitioners were male, corresponding to 40.9% of medical students.

Due to the small sample size, male and female data were combined. However, there was no statistically significant difference in obesity between males and females, in both medical practitioners and medical students. The proportion of weight status of medical practitioners and medical students is presented in Table 1. The percentage of underweight was higher among medical students (32.1%) compared to medical practitioners (8.2%). In contrast, overweight and obesity were more prevalent among medical practitioners than medical students. The difference in weight status between the two groups was highly statistically significant ($p<0.0001$).

This is the first report on obesity among medical workers in Bahrain, and perhaps in the Arab Gulf countries. The relatively high proportion of underweight among medical students is unexpected, as these students should have adequate information on balanced diets. There is no study on the nutrition content of meals in medical schools. In Bahrain however, Musaiger ⁵ reported that nutrition was not given enough attention in nursing and medical schools in the country. This will negatively affect the knowledge and attitudes of the graduate students to sound food habits.

The high percentage of overweight and obesity among medical practitioners questions the healthy lifestyle of these subjects. Medical professionals, especially those who deal directly with patients, should set a good example of a healthy figure. Medical advice cannot be effective in changing behaviour if health professionals do not act as health models who will encourage their patients to behave like them. Therefore, it is recommended that health workers should practice a healthy lifestyle and use it in their medical practice. More studies on the lifestyle of health workers are recommended to compare it with the lifestyle of the general population.

REFERENCES

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Table 1. Nutrition status of medical practitioners and medical students in Bahrain (based on body mass index BMI)

Nutrition status	Medical practitioners		Medical students	
	No.	%	No.	%
Underweight (BMI<20)	13	8.2	17	32.1
Normal (BMI 20-24.9)	75	47.5	24	45.3
Overweight/obese (BMI≥25)	70	44.3	12	22.6
Total	158	100.0	53	100.0

X²=20.71 P<0.0001