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ABSTRACT

Assessment of Factors Associated with Obesity among Gaza Secondary Schools' Female Students in Palestine

Doa Al Najjar¹
University of Palestine¹

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Globally, obesity has increased among children, adolescents, and adults. At least 2.8 million people die each year worldwide as a result of being overweight or obese; mortality rates have shown to be proportional to the degree of obesity. Younger age groups are affected as demonstrated in nearly one-third of American college students who are overweight or obese. According to the WHO, 30–80% of adults and about 20% of children and adolescents in Europe are overweight. The situation in Asia is better; this is shown in the lower prevalence of obesity in Thailand and China. With obesity becoming an overwhelming global public health issue, there are a multitude of obesity-associated diseases, such as heart disease, diabetes, hypertension, and certain cancers. Although obesity in adolescence is less prominently associated with morbidity, it is nevertheless a strong precursor of obesity and related morbidity in adulthood. Adolescence has been identified as a critical period in the development of overweight/obesity patterns, with the transition to college being another potentially important period of risk for weight increase among young adults. Individual behaviors and environmental factors can contribute to excess caloric intake and inadequate amounts of physical activity. The current high rates of obesity have been attributed to, in part, increased snacking and eating away from home, larger portion sizes, greater exposure to food advertising, limited access to physical activity opportunities, and labor-saving technological advances (Duffey & Popkin, 2011; Piernas & Popkin, 2011; Powell et al., 2011; Sallis & Glanz, 2009). Childhood and adolescent obesity have increased substantially in the past two decades raising concerns about the physical and psychosocial consequences of childhood obesity. In Palestine, the prevalence of obesity has been increasing for decades for both males and females in all age groups. It is about 18% in adult males and 26% in adult females.