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Knowledge, attitudes, and practices among parents regarding childhood obesity: A cross-sectional study in the UAE

Abstract:

Introduction: Childhood obesity is a growing global health issue, with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) ranking 21st and 24th globally for obesity prevalence among boys and girls, respectively. Obesity in early life poses long-term physical and psychological risks. As primary influencers of children's behavior, parents play a vital role in obesity prevention. This cross-sectional study evaluates the knowledge, attitudes, and practices (KAP) of parents in Ras Al Khaimah (RAK) and Fujairah, aiming to inform targeted public health strategies in the UAE.

Methodology: A quantitative cross-sectional survey was conducted between January and May 2024 among parents or guardians of students in government schools (grades 1–12) in RAK and Fujairah. A total of 510 participants completed a culturally validated questionnaire adapted from the “We Can” program. The instrument assessed demographic variables and KAP through Likert-scale and true/false questions. Data analysis was performed using SPSS v23, employing descriptive statistics and Chi-square tests with significance set at $p < 0.05$.

Management: Findings revealed high levels of awareness: 96.3% of parents demonstrated good knowledge, 88.4% had positive attitudes, and 97.8% reported good practices toward childhood obesity prevention. Notably, positive attitudes and good knowledge were strong predictors of healthy practices ($OR = 23.42$ and $OR = 6.30$, respectively). However, younger and less-educated parents exhibited less favorable attitudes, and parents in Fujairah had significantly lower scores in physical activity and dietary behaviors compared to those in RAK. These insights emphasize the need for focused educational and behavioral interventions.

Conclusion: Parents in both emirates exhibit commendable awareness and behaviors regarding childhood obesity, though demographic disparities persist. Targeted education for younger and less-educated parents and localized interventions in Fujairah are necessary. The study supports policy efforts to enhance community environments and promote healthy lifestyles, while recommending future longitudinal and culturally adapted research to sustain behavior change.

Biography

Sojoud Alsheraifi is a Consultant in Family Medicine and Project Manager for Non-Communicable Diseases at Emirates Health Services. She earned her medical degree from the University of Sharjah in 2012, completed her residency in 2019, and holds certifications from the Arab Board and the Royal College of General Practitioners (MRCGP). In 2025, she obtained a Master of Science in Diabetes Care from the University of Warwick. Since 2020, Dr. Alsheraifi has played a key role in national healthcare initiatives, combining clinical expertise with strategic leadership to advance public health outcomes across the UAE.