Subtheme 3: Education, the pandemic, and beyond   OP25

Prevalence of overweight and obesity, associated factors, and weight reduction methods adopted by the Medical Students of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Jaffna

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Background and Objective: In Sri Lanka, there is a relatively high prevalence of overweight and obesity, particularly abdominal obesity, among adults. To control the disease at an early stage, urgent public health measures are required. This study describes the prevalence of overweight and obesity, associated factors, and weight reduction methods adopted by students of Faculty of Medicine, University of Jaffna.

Methods: An institution-based descriptive cross-sectional study was done among students of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Jaffna from August 2020 to January 2022. After the exclusion of pregnant/lactating students and those on regular medications, 567 of a total study population of 722 students from all five batches participated in the study. Data were collected by self-administered questionnaires. Height and weight were measured and BMI was calculated. BMI was categorized according to the WHO cut-offs (underweight BMI<18.5, normal weight BMI 18.5 to <25, overweight BMI 25 to <30, obese BMI >30). Data were entered and analyzed using SPSS. Chi-square test was done to find out the association among the variables.

Results: A total of 46.4% (n=263) were obese (24.16%) or overweight (22.22%), and 10.4% were underweight. Out of the overweight and obese, 31.7% (n=83) resided in boarding places, 49.6% (n=130) at the hostel, and 18.7% (n=49) at home. Most of the obese or overweight students (81.5%, n=457) had none to a slight disturbance in sleep, which was categorized based on the Promise scoring system. Among the participants, physical activity levels were categorised according to the METs scoring system and 33.2% (n=162) had low, 27.7% (n=135) had moderate and 39.1% (n=191) had high physical activity. There was no significant association between sleep disturbance and BMI (p=0.729) but there was an association between physical activity and BMI (p=0.039). Among weight reduction methods followed by the students, diet planning 42.2% (n=111) was the commonest, while surgical interventions were rarely followed.

Conclusions: The prevalence of overweight and obesity was 46.4% among the students. The diet pattern of all the students was nearly the same. There was no association between sleep disturbance and BMI but there was an association between physical activity and BMI. Most of the students followed a diet plan to reduce weight.

Keywords: Obesity, Overweight, Sleep, Physical activity, Diet