



**ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER**

**Paediatrics**

**PARENTAL PERCEPTIONS OF CHILDHOOD OBESITY: ASSESSING KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDES**

**KEY WORDS:**

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**ABSTRACT**

Childhood obesity is a global health concern with significant implications for short and long-term health outcomes. Parental perceptions, knowledge, and attitudes play a crucial role in shaping children's lifestyle behaviors and influencing the prevalence of obesity. Understanding parental perspectives is essential for developing effective interventions. **Methodology:** A cross-sectional observational study was conducted among 174 parents to assess their knowledge, attitudes, and challenges related to childhood obesity. Descriptive statistics were employed for data analysis, ensuring ethical standards were met throughout the study. **Results:** Parents predominantly defined childhood obesity as excess body weight, with medical professionals being a primary source of information. Concerns about obesity were prevalent, along with challenges such as limited access to healthy foods and peer pressure. The study highlighted the need for tailored interventions to address these concerns effectively. **Discussion:** The findings align with prior research, emphasizing the universal nature of parental concerns. Leveraging parental knowledge and attitudes is crucial for combating childhood obesity and promoting healthier lifestyles. **Conclusion:** The study underscores the importance of understanding parental perceptions to devise comprehensive interventions. By addressing parental concerns and providing appropriate support, health education can effectively prevent childhood obesity and foster healthier communities.

**INTRODUCTION**

The World Health Organisation defines childhood obesity as obesity is weight-for-height greater than 3 standard deviations above the WHO Child Growth Standards median<sup>[1]</sup>. Childhood obesity has become a prevalent global health issue, characterized by an alarming increase in the number of children and adolescents affected worldwide. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that over 340 million children and adolescents aged 5-19 were overweight or obese in 2016, marking a significant rise from previous decades<sup>[1]</sup>. This epidemic has profound implications for both short-term and long-term health outcomes, including an increased risk of developing chronic conditions such as type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and certain cancers<sup>[2]</sup>.

Parents play a critical role in shaping their children's dietary habits, physical activity levels, and overall lifestyle choices, thereby influencing the development and trajectory of childhood obesity<sup>[3]</sup>. Parental perceptions, knowledge, and attitudes regarding childhood obesity are key determinants of the behaviors and practices implemented within the home environment. Research suggests that parental beliefs about the causes, consequences, and prevention strategies of childhood obesity significantly impact their efforts to promote healthy behaviors and prevent obesity in their children<sup>[4]</sup>.

Understanding parental perceptions of childhood obesity is essential for designing effective interventions aimed at combating this epidemic. Several studies have investigated parental knowledge and attitudes towards childhood obesity, highlighting the complex interplay of socio-cultural, environmental, and psychological factors that shape parental behaviors<sup>[5]</sup>. Additionally, exploring parental experiences, challenges, and needs related to childhood obesity can inform the development of targeted interventions that address knowledge gaps and empower parents to create supportive environments for their children<sup>[6]</sup>.

The main objectives of this study are to assess parental

knowledge and attitudes towards childhood obesity to explore the relationship between parental perceptions, behaviors, and the prevention of childhood obesity, aiming to inform evidence-based interventions and support strategies.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:**

A cross-sectional survey was electronically distributed via email and social media platforms to parents of children aged 5-18 years, excluding those with children outside this age range. Survey questions were designed based on specified factors, encompassing parental knowledge, attitudes, challenges, and preferences regarding childhood obesity. Out of 250 distributed questionnaires, 174 valid responses were obtained. Data analysis utilized descriptive statistics to quantitatively assess parental responses.

Ethical considerations included ensuring confidentiality and anonymity of participants, with adherence to ethical standards throughout the study. Ethical clearance was obtained prior to commencing the research from the Independent Ethical Committee of ASCOMS and hospital vide number ASCOMS/IEC/2024/Meeting-2/01. Additionally, consent was also obtained digitally from the parents before they started answering the questionnaire.

**RESULTS:**

In the following section, the results of our study focusing on parental perceptions, knowledge, attitudes, and challenges related to childhood obesity among a sample of 174 participants are presented.

**Table 1: Parental Knowledge about Childhood Obesity**

Question	Response	Number of Responses
Definition of childhood obesity	Having excess body weight for a child's height and age	125
	Being slightly overweight	10

	Being taller than average for one's age	7
	Being underweight	9
	Do not know	23
Where did you hear about childhood obesity	Medical professionals (e.g., doctors, pediatricians)	56
	Educational materials (e.g., school programs, brochures)	38
	Media sources (e.g., television, internet, newspapers)	45
	Personal experiences or discussions with family and friends	35
Factors contributing to childhood obesity	Genetics	99
	Not eating a balanced diet	10
	Not performing regular physical activity	11
	Unlimited screen time	15
	Do not know	39
Ways parents can help prevent childhood obesity	Modeling healthy eating habits	105
	Allowing limited screen time	4
	Encouraging non- sedentary behavior	2
	Providing a balanced diet	13
	Do not know	50
Role of physical activity in preventing childhood obesity	It helps burn calories and maintain a healthy weight	79
	It has a huge impact on obesity risk	27
	It helps build strong muscles	32
	Do not know	36
Potential consequence of childhood obesity	Increased risk of chronic diseases like diabetes	104
	Worsened overall health	22
	Decreased self-esteem	11
	Increased risk of future health problems	26
	Do not know	11

The table illustrates parental perspectives on childhood obesity: 125 identify it as excess weight, 56 acquire knowledge from medical professionals, 99 attribute it to genetics, and 105 advocate modeling healthy eating. Additionally, 79 recognize physical activity's role, while 104 cite increased diabetes risk as a consequence.

**Table 2: Parental Attitudes regarding Childhood Obesity**

Question	Option	Responses
Concern about Childhood Obesity	A. Not Concerned	56
	B. Somewhat Concerned	32
	C. Moderately Concerned	67
	D. Very Concerned	19
Frequency of Discussing Healthy Habits with Children	A. Daily	14
	B. Weekly	38
	C. Occasionally	76
	D. Rarely	46
Challenges Parents Face in Promoting Healthy Lifestyle Habits	A. Lack of Time	12
	B. Limited Access to Healthy Foods	27
	C. Peer Pressure	24
	D. All of the Above	104
	E. None of the above	7
Impact of Parental Influence on Child Obesity	A. Yes, Strongly	75
	B. Yes, Somewhat	51
	C. No, Not Really	23
	D. Unsure	25

Additional Support Needed to Combat Childhood Obesity	A. Parenting Workshops on Healthy Habits	76
	B. Affordable Access to Nutritious Foods	48
	C. Community Fitness Programs for Families	22
	D. School-based Health Education Initiatives	15
	E. Do not know	13

Table 2 outlines parental attitudes on childhood obesity: 67 are moderately concerned, 76 discuss healthy habits occasionally, 104 face challenges like lack of time, 75 strongly believe in parental influence, and 76 seek parenting workshops for additional support.

**DISCUSSION:**

The findings of this study resonate with prior research on parental perceptions of childhood obesity. Consistent with Birch et al. (2001)<sup>[4]</sup> and Lindsay et al. (2006)<sup>[3]</sup>, parents predominantly define childhood obesity as excess body weight for a child's height and age. Similarly, the influence of medical professionals on parental knowledge resonates with findings from studies by Jain et al. (2014)<sup>[7]</sup> and Rhee et al. (2005)<sup>[8]</sup>. Additionally, studies by Smith et al. (2019)<sup>[10]</sup> and Thompson et al. (2012)<sup>[11]</sup> further corroborate these trends, emphasizing the enduring impact of healthcare providers on parental understanding. Moreover, the concerns expressed by parents and the challenges they face mirror results from studies by Davison et al. (2003)<sup>[6]</sup> and Bauer et al. (2011)<sup>[9]</sup>, alongside insights from Rivera et al. (2008)<sup>[12]</sup> and Swinburn et al. (2004)<sup>[13]</sup>. These similarities underscore the universal nature of parental concerns and highlight the need for tailored interventions across diverse populations. Understanding parental attitudes and knowledge is pivotal in devising effective strategies to combat childhood obesity and promote healthier lifestyles. Integrating findings from these studies, interventions should leverage these insights to provide comprehensive support to families in fostering environments conducive to healthy behaviors and preventing childhood obesity. Overall, the alignment of our findings with a breadth of existing research underscores the robustness of parental perceptions across various contexts. By synthesizing evidence from multiple studies, this discussion emphasizes the importance of targeted interventions that address common concerns while considering the unique challenges faced by different populations. Such interventions hold promise in curbing the escalating rates of childhood obesity and fostering healthier communities globally.

**CONCLUSION:**

Our study reveals crucial insights into parental perceptions and attitudes towards childhood obesity. Parents largely recognize childhood obesity as excess body weight for a child's height and age, with medical professionals being a significant source of information. Concerns about childhood obesity are prevalent among parents, who also acknowledge the challenges they face in promoting healthy lifestyle habits for their children. The study underscores the universal nature of these concerns and emphasizes the need for tailored interventions to address them effectively across diverse populations. Understanding parental attitudes and knowledge is essential for devising strategies to combat childhood obesity and foster healthier lifestyles. Therefore, interventions like health education etc. should capitalize on these insights to provide comprehensive support to families, including parenting workshops and initiatives promoting access to nutritious foods and community fitness programs. By addressing parental concerns and providing appropriate support, these interventions can create environments conducive to healthy behaviors and contribute to the prevention of childhood obesity.

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