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**Research article**

**OBESITY LEVELS, KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE OF HEALTHY LIFESTYLE AMONG UPSI STUDENTS**

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**Abstract**

*Journal of Sports Science and Physical Education* 3(1): 65–70, 2015 - This study is aimed to evaluate the obesity level and promote a healthy lifestyle among students at Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Perak. Fifteen male and fifteen female undergraduate students aged between 19 years to 24 years from each faculty of university Pendidikan Sultan Idris are randomly selected as samples (n=270). The Body Mass Index (BMI) and modified questionnaires by Burton (1999) are used as instruments for this study. Analysis showed that 15.9% of the respondents are overweight, 23.7% are in pre-obese level, 27.8% are in obese level one and 3.7% respondents are in obese level two. T-test analysis of independent samples was used to determine the level of knowledge and a healthy lifestyle among male and female students. The results showed that there is no significant difference between male and female students in the levels of healthy lifestyle practices with  $p = 0.089$  ( $p > 0.05$ ); the level of a healthy lifestyle practices among males ( $M = 71.57$ ,  $SD = 8:42$ ) have almost the same mean with females ( $M = 70.05$ ,  $SD = 6:00$ ). Furthermore, the findings indicate that the scores on the levels of knowledge on healthy lifestyle for male

students is ( $M = 79.09$ ,  $SD = 7:38$ ), while the mean score for female students is ( $M = 76.95$ ,  $SD = 8:59$ ) with  $p = 0.028$  ( $p < 0.05$ ). On comparing the means of the scores on the levels of knowledge on healthy lifestyle, the male students scored higher than the female students. It turns out there is a difference between male and female students in terms of the level of knowledge on healthy lifestyle. The study found that the respondents have a good knowledge on healthy lifestyle, but lack practice in daily life. This is an unpleasant indication because Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris students are facing the risk of cardiovascular-related diseases caused by obesity and a sedentary lifestyle.

**Keywords:** *Obesity, healthy lifestyle, students.*

**Introduction**

The practice of healthy life style is a campaign by the government of Malaysia which aspires to produce a healthy, fit, prosperous community which will be free from diseases caused by sedentary lifestyle. The primary target of this campaign is the entire Malaysian population, especially teenagers and students of higher learning institutions. The four main components which form the core of the healthy lifestyle

campaign are the knowledge and practice in nutrition, handling stress, anti-smoking and sports (Malaysian Statistic Dept., 2004). Each of these components stimulates humans to be healthy physically and mentally while reinforcing confidence and drive in their daily activities.

Lifestyle does influence the health of a person. Obesity among Malaysian population is worrying recently. According to reports from the third National Health Morbidity Survey (NHMSS III) by the Ministry of Health, a total of 16.2 million or 60% of the population is facing problems in being overweight as early as in their childhood. Of the 16.2 million overweight populations, 8.1 million or 30 percent of them are overweight while another 30 percent are obese.

Positive lifestyle practices such as physical activities for at least 30 minutes 3 times a week and balanced diet will help a person to be healthy physically, mentally, spiritually and intelligent (Baumgartner, Mahar & Rowe, 2003). Healthy lifestyle should be a practice for every individual regardless of their age. If a person does not practice a healthy lifestyle, he or she may easily fall as a victim to diseases, conflicts and stress.

Obesity can occur to anyone (Mohamud, Musa, Khir & Ismail, 2011). Obesity is influenced by many factors. Some inherit it since childhood through genetics, low metabolic rate and social factors. If efforts to counter overweight do not start early it may be prolonged into adulthood (Deborah, 2010). In actual fact, to safeguard our physique does not mean to possess a slim, attractive body and beautiful figure but in choosing a balanced diet according to the food pyramid. Most importantly, obesity should be avoided because it has been identified as the root cause for all diseases related to cardiovascular system (Levine, 2010).

Today obesity has become one of the global problem faced by populations in developed countries such United States of America, Australia and France. Malaysia as a developing country is neither lagging behind in this matter (WHO, 2010). Obesity which could cause dangerous diseases is closely associated with unhealthy lifestyles such as intake of unbalanced diet and lack of physical exercise. In University Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI) the number of obese undergraduate students is increasing. It exposes them to face the risks of diseases such as heart diseases, diabetes mellitus and high blood pressure. Lack of knowledge and the practice of unhealthy lifestyle are among the factors that cause obesity. So in this context this research intends to find out the levels of obesity, knowledge and healthy lifestyle practice among the students in University Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Perak.

This study appears to be a current need that would benefit the students in UPSI. Among the interests in this study would be to identify and clarify the levels of obesity and lifestyle among the students in UPSI. It will also enlighten the students on the importance of healthy lifestyle in their daily lives. At the moment it is estimated the 6.7 percent of students from schools and higher learning institutions aged between 10 to 23 years are either overweight or obese and this figure is expected to rise every year.

A study by Wi-Young So (2012), on 72399 secondary school students in Korea, found that among the male students the habit of spending time at home by playing computer games and watching television cause them to fall into the overweight and obese categories. As such, this research found that active life style practices are the right steps towards reducing obesity among students.

Yahya Buntat and Mohd Rozikin (2012), did a research involving 172 universities to find out the perception of

students towards the influence of nutritional practices, leisure, time management and environmental practices on body weight. They found that the perception of students towards nutritional practices, leisure activities and environment has only a modest influence in body weight. But practices in leisure activities have greater influence on body weight.

A study by Fran and Wien (2010), among 250 university students revealed that those students who are overweight and obese usually have a culture or practice of unhealthy lifestyle such as unbalanced nutritional practices and lack of physical activities. Other than that the study also found overweight and unhealthy lifestyle while in university results obesity in the future.

Jennifer Boyle and Nicole Larose (2008) reviewed the knowledge, lifestyle and nutritional practices of 169 university students. They found students who have problems of being overweight or obese usually due to their lifestyle which does not involve them in physical activities and the intake of unbalanced nutrition. Literature findings prove problems of overweight and obesity are related to knowledge and healthy lifestyle practices of an individual. Additionally the knowledge is not fully translated into practice in daily life thus inviting a host of risks to acquire diseases.

## Methods

Fifteen male and fifteen female undergraduate students aged between 19 years to 24 years from each faculty of university Pendidikan Sultan Idris are randomly selected as samples (n=270). The Body Mass Index (BMI) and modified

questionnaires by Burton (1999) are used as instruments for this study.

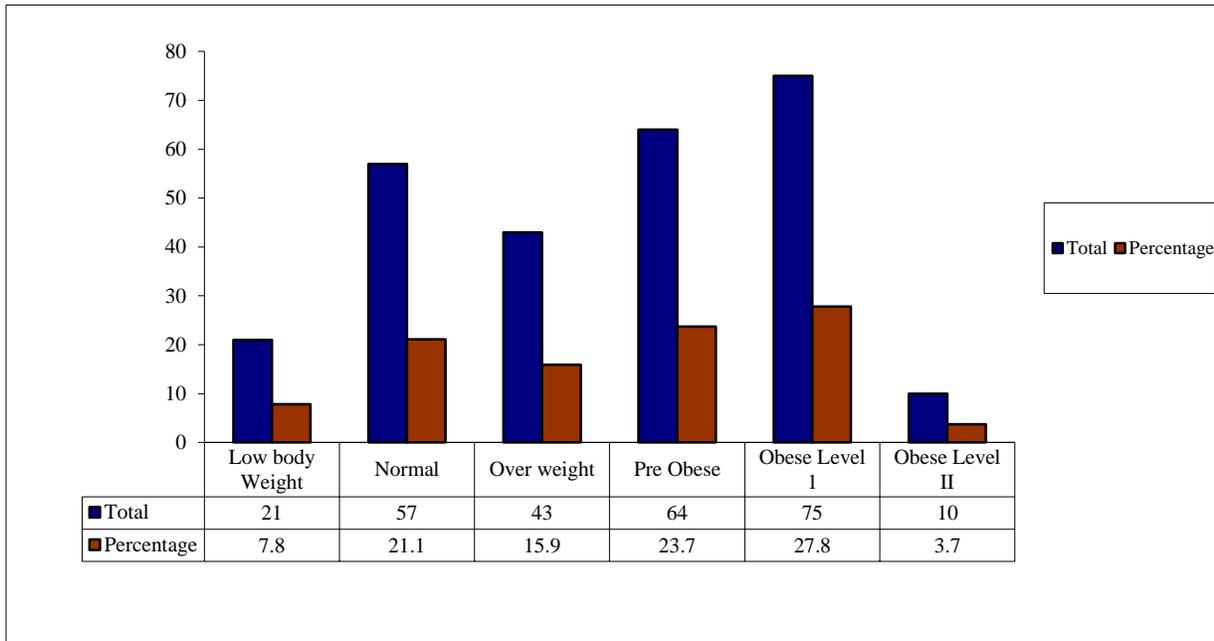
## Findings

Based on the findings, the researchers are able to prove that 21 of the students (7.8%) are under weight. A total of 57 (21.1%) are at normal, while 43 (15.9%) are in the overweight category. 64 (23.7%) are at pre obese and a total of 75 (27.8%) are in obesity level 1 and 10 (3.7%) of them are in obesity level 2. On the whole a total of 149 (55.20%) of them are in the obese category, which does not bode well because this group will eventually face multiple risks of a host of cardiovascular related diseases. (Figure 1).

Table 1 and 2 shows the comparison of mean and standard deviation of levels of healthy lifestyle practices between male and female students. Independent t-test analysis shows no significant difference between male and female students of UPSI in healthy lifestyle practices.  $P=0.089$  ( $p>0.05$ ). Healthy lifestyle practices among the male students at  $M= 71.57$ ,  $SD = 8.42$  is almost same with the girls at  $M=70.05$ ,  $SD=6.00$ .

The results of independent t-test showed the scores in healthy lifestyle knowledge among male students as  $M= 79.9$  and  $SD = 7.38$ . Whereas the scores for female students are  $M=76.96$  and  $SD= 8.59$ . Value of  $p= 0.028$ , ( $p < 0.05$ ). Independent t-test shows the score for levels of knowledge on healthy lifestyle among the male is higher compared to female students. This proves the existence of difference between male and female students on the knowledge of healthy life style in UPSI.

**Figure 1:** Classification of respondents based on Body Mass Index



**Table 1:** Descriptive Analysis of healthy lifestyle practices between male and female students.

	Gender	N	Mean	Standard deviation
Practices	Male	135	71.57	8.42
	Female	135	70.05	6.00

**Table 2:** Independent t- test

		Lavene's test Variance equation		Mean equation for t test		
		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig.(2-t)
Obesity	Equality of Variance assumption	3.601	.059	1.707	268	0.089
	Equality of Variance B/Assumption			1.707	242.286	0.089

**Table 3:** Descriptive Analysis of knowledge on healthy lifestyle between male and female students

	Gender	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Knowledge	Male	135	79.09	7.38
	Female	135	76.95	8.49

**Table 4:** Independent t test

		Lavene's test	Mean equation			
		Variance equation	for t test			
		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig (2-t)
Obesity	Equality	1.140	.287	2.209	268	.028
	Of variance assumption Equality Variance B/Assumption			2.209	262.918	.028

### Discussion

Based on statistical analysis and discussion we can conclude that the risks of obesity among the students of Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris are very much worrying. To overcome this, efforts should be adopted by the students themselves to overcome the problems, failing which it may continue until they complete their studies and join the workforce. This study also found that the students that have high levels of knowledge on healthy lifestyle that differ by gender do not practice a healthy lifestyle in their daily lives. Most of the students do not apply their knowledge on nutrition, sports and recreation in their daily activities in the university.

Obesity is very often linked to unhealthy lifestyle as it is one of the current problems in both developed and developing countries. Overeating is considered one of the factors that contribute to obesity.

Another contributing factor to obesity is sedentary lifestyle with little physical activities and recreation. Other than that, the contemporary lifestyle whereby the students are more likely to spend their time for hours in front of computers, they prefer to spend time on social websites like Facebook, twitter and others. At the same time, they eat fast food like burger, nuggets and so on while surfing the net. It is clear to us why our lifestyle causes obesity. In this context, we hope the students will be more aware of their lifestyle practices in trying to reduce the problems of obesity that they face now. Knowledge and healthy lifestyle practices are very closely associated. It is a waste to studiously acquire knowledge but do not practice them in daily activities.

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