

Abstract

Young People's Health Interest, Nutrition Knowledge, and Views about Obesity [†]

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Abstract: Background: Obesity is prevalent in young people, yet limited research explores young people's views regarding nutrition, health, and obesity. Objectives: The aim of this study was to explore young people's views about obesity and factors mitigating this condition. Methods: An online cross-sectional survey was distributed to UK participants aged 12–19. The survey measured views about obesity and its management (Likert scale of 1–5, 14 questions), interest in health and nutrition (Likert scale of 1–5, 2 questions), and nutrition knowledge (scored as “low” or “high” based on a threshold of giving 3 out of 6 correct answers to multiple-choice questions about nutrient sources in diet). Self-reported weight, height, and sociodemographic data were collected. Independence between variables was explored using χ^2 tests. Results: Participants ($n = 317$, median age of 16, IQR15–18) were equally distributed between the two sexes (54% boys) and were mostly British (72%). Approximately one quarter (22%) had a BMI ≥ 30 kg/m² and most (61%) had a BMI < 25 kg/m². Participants had a high interest in health (median 4, IQR 4–5, 86% agreeing/strongly agreeing) and in the relationship between food, diet, and health (median 5, IQR 4–5, 83% agreeing/strongly agreeing). However, most participants (83%) had low nutrition knowledge. There was a relationship between interest in health (classified as interested/neutral/not interested) and sex ($p = 0.02$, 81% girls and 90% boys interested), but no relationship with BMI groups ($p = 0.5$). Over half (59%) agreed that obesity is a medical condition (median 4, IQR 3–4). There was a relationship between this agreement and sex ($p < 0.001$, 68% girls and 53% boys), but no relationship with BMI ($p = 0.9$) or nutrition knowledge ($p = 0.9$). Across the weight management options (including dieting, exercise, surgery, and medication), participants most likely agreed that combining diet and exercise is important to manage obesity (median 4, IQR 4–5, 77% agreeing/strongly agreeing). There was a relationship between this agreement and nutrition knowledge ($p = 0.04$, 75% among those with low knowledge and 90% among those with high knowledge), but no relationship with sex ($p = 0.08$) or BMI ($p = 0.9$). Discussion: In this sample representative of both sexes, obesity was generally recognised as a disease regardless of BMI or nutrition knowledge; however, sex played a role, with boys less likely to agree, despite their greater interest in health than girls. However, the sample's levels of interest in health (high) and nutrition knowledge (low) were homogenous, which limited further exploration. The influences of socioeconomic status, parental occupation, and family obesity experiences need further exploration.



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