

Self-Perceptions and Beliefs on Obesity among Obese Staff in Malaysia Military University

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Abstract: Obesity is a public health issue in many countries nowadays. It is associated with increased risk of developing type-2 diabetes, chronic pain and depression. In Malaysia, the prevalence of overweight and obesity were found 33.6% and 19.5% respectively in previous data. Multicomponent interventions (e.g., physical activity, self-perceptions, and life style changes) can lead to an average weight loss of 4 to 7 kg. This study aims to illustrate on some social and behavioral characteristics associated with bodyweight (BW). Selected thirty obese staff were included in this study. The body mass index (BMI) greater than 30 or BW more than 80kg were eligible to involve. A self-administered questionnaire was constructed based on social items, physical items and internal items in the causes of obesity. Data were analyzed descriptively. Most respondents believed that they could be thinner if they wanted to reduce weight. More than 80% of participants agreed that they easily be available fatty foods. 63.3% of them perceived that they became obese because of the lots of sugar and fat in their food. More than half of the respondents disagreed that obese people usually have medical conditions that cause them to get overweight. 53.3% of them disagreed that the obese people were born as fat baby are impossible to lose weight. Half of the participants believed that obesity is related to their genetics and 66.7% of them perceived that they cannot really control how much they eat. More than 80% of them believed that they do not have enough exercises and half of them agreed that if they have will power, they would be able to stop eating much and are not being lazy. This study highlighted the somewhat information on obesity and their beliefs. The further conventional study is needed to understand strategies for implementing effective weight loss program.

Key words: *Obesity, Perception and Believes, Obese Adults*

BACKGROUND

Nowadays, obesity is a public health concern in many countries. Obesity is associated with increased risk of developing type 2 diabetes, lower health related quality of life and increased risk of chronic pain and depression [1][2]. Approximately 200 million men and 300 million women are currently obese worldwide [3]. The prevalence of multiple health conditions and the utilization of health care are significantly higher among obese patients in primary care practice [4]. In Malaysian adult populations, the prevalence of overweight and obesity were found to be 33.6% and 19.5% respectively in Peninsular and East Malaysia [5]. The self-perception, beliefs and optimizing the

maintenance of lifestyle changes can lead to an average weight loss of 4 to 7 kg [6-7]. The prevalence of obesity reflects changes in society, where modern lifestyle patterns are often influenced by excessive choices of fatty food, type of meal [8] and lack of physical activities [9]. Hence, we considered to ensure the survey study in our National Defence University of Malaysia (NDUM).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND AIM

Two questions to be mentioned for this study as previous research. First of all, self-attitude towards obesity could be predicted and beliefs of the individuals about the causes of obesity was explored. Secondly, we examined whether obese

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staff internal beliefs could be guessing from perceptions of weight control for future conventional BW control programme. This study is aimed to illuminate some social and behavioural characteristics associated with bodyweight, self-perceptions and believes about obesity.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

At the age of 18 years to 69 years who work in NDUM both academic and non-academic staff were included in this study. The 30 participants have a BMI greater than 30 or weight more than 80kg were eligible to involve in this survey.

Calculation of BMI

The staff from the medical clinic of NDUM measured the participants’ height and weight to calculate BMI using the standard formula (weight in kilogram / height in meter squared). We considered the BMI 30–40 kg/m² as obese.

Questionnaire

A structured self-administered questionnaire was constructed based on previous research and encompassed three dimensions. The questionnaire

included three components: (1) Social items (2) Physical items (3) Internal items in the causes of Obesity Instrument. The 3-point Likert scale was used for responses including “Strongly agree”; “Strongly disagree” or “Not sure”.

Demographics

We also collected their personal data of age, sex, race, academic or non- academic staff. Data were analyzed descriptively using IBM [10] SPSS Statistics for Windows, version 21.13 17.

FINDINGS

The being obese participants are female and non – academic staff from NDUM. The middle aged respondents (average 35.7 year) and average BMI was 31.9 in Table 1.

Social item in the cause of obesity

In figure 1, the obese staff (93.1%) thought that some people who grew up in places where there are lots of adults eat too much of food. More than 80% of participants agreed that they easily be available fatty foods. 63.3% of them perceived that they became obese because of the lots of sugar and fat in their food and they have bad eating habits.

Table 1: Descriptive Characteristics of the Respondents (n = 30)

Socio-demographic characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	11	36.7
Female	19	63.3
Race		
Malay	28	93.3
Indian	0	0.0
Chinese	0	0.0
Others	2	6.7
Category of staff		
Academic	9	30.0
Non-academic	21	70.0
	Mean	(±SD)
Age (year)	35.7	5.6
BMI	31.9	2.2

Physical item in the cause of obesity

The figure 2 showed more than half of the respondents disagreed that obese people usually have medical conditions that cause them to get overweight. 53.3% of them disagreed that the obese people were born as fat baby are impossible to lose

weight. Half of the participants believed that obesity is related to their genetics and 66.7% of them perceived that they cannot really control how much they eat. The obese staff (60%) believed that they can’t control their body weight because of hormones.

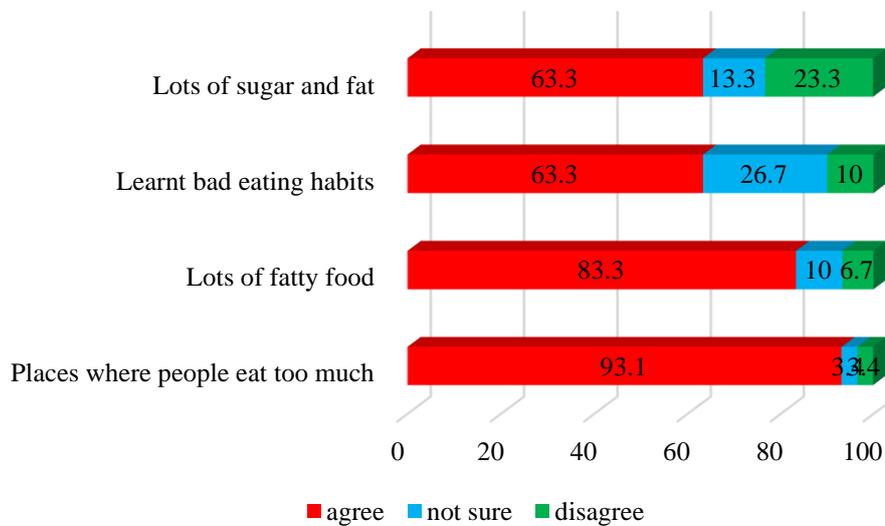


Figure 1: Responses related with social item in the cause of obesity (%)

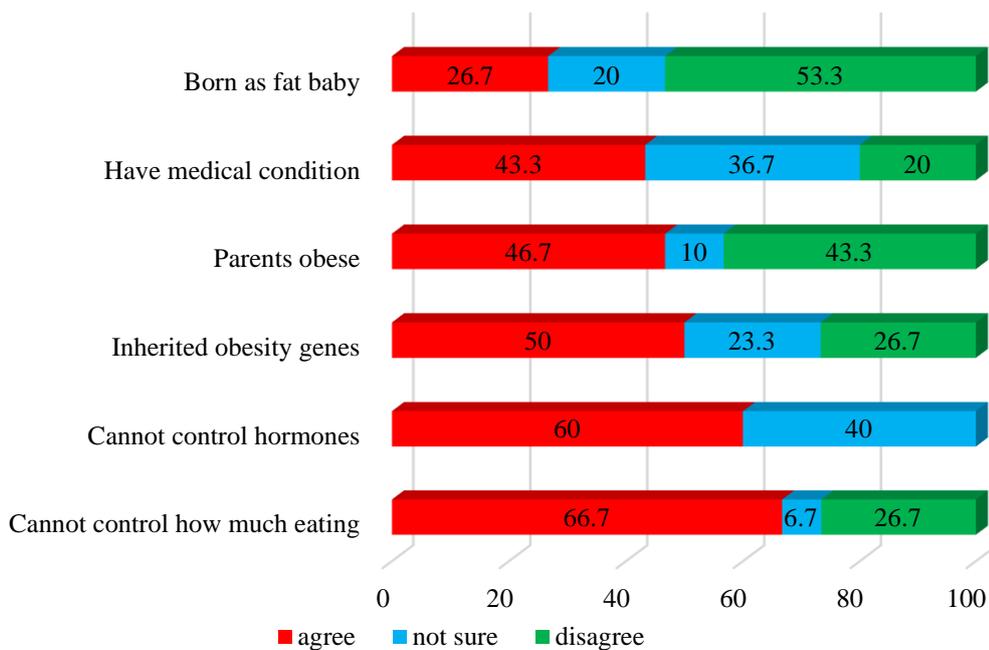


Figure 2: Responses related with physical item in the cause of obesity (%)

Internal item in the cause of obesity

More than 80% of respondents believed that they do not have enough exercises and 60% of them agreed that if they have will power, they would be able to stop eating much and 76.7% of obese adult felt that they are keep on eating even when they are full. 63.3% of them believed that they become fat

because of being lazy. More than 40% of participants disagreed that people get obese because they like to watching TV too much. Obese people believed that they could be thinner if they really wanted (70%) while they perceived that they can lose their weight by joining weight loss group. See Figure 3 for more details.

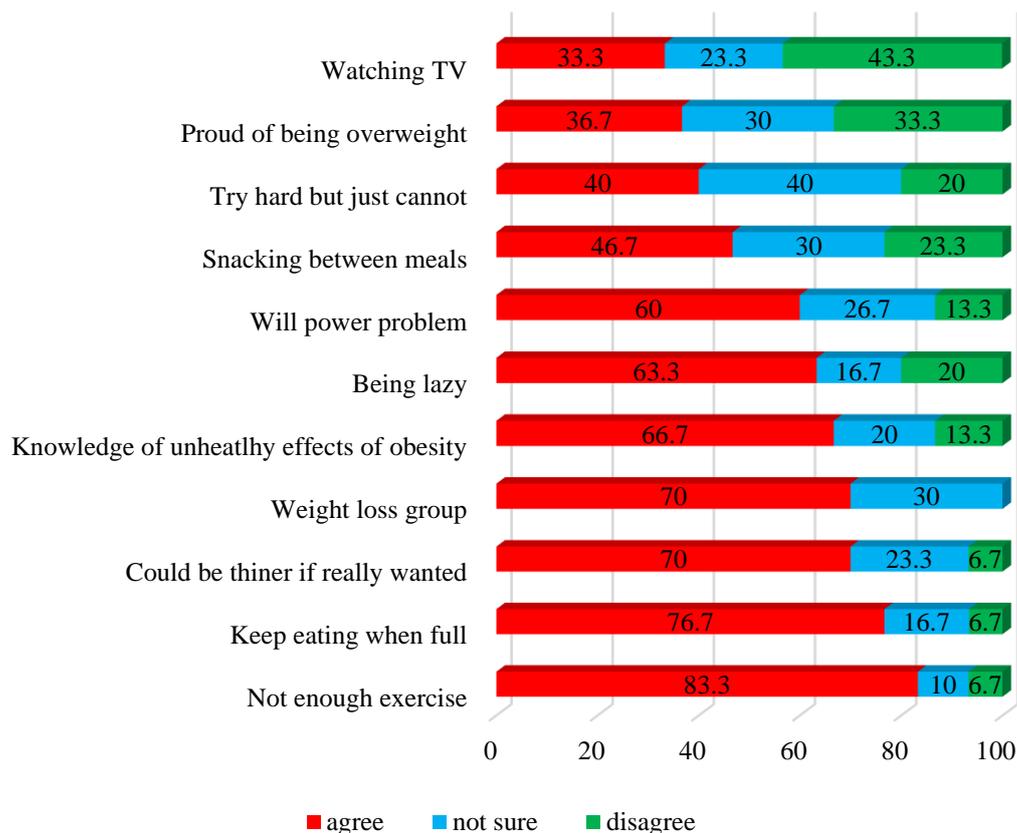


Figure 3: Responses related with internal item in the cause of obesity (%)

DISCUSSION

A previous study of Alfa J. Muhihi et.al [11] and other studies indicated that the prevalence of obesity is higher among women compared to men. Our findings also showed that the prevalence of obesity is higher among women staff compared to men (63.3% versus 36.7%).

Sahasporin Paeratakul et al and Gutierrez-Fisac et al. [12] and Kimberly P. Truesdale and June Stevens [13] have assessed perception about body weight by relying on self-reported values of weights and heights, which can also be over- or underestimated²⁴. However, our study used the actual measurement of weights and heights from our staff in NDUM so this was a strength of our study.

Paul A. Klaczynski. et.al [14] examined that youths' self-esteem could be predicted from perceptions of control over weight. They derived the hypothesis that internalization of cultural beliefs about the value of thinness. In our study, we described the perceptions of obese individuals and their internal beliefs. According to our results, most of the respondents believed that they could be thinner if they really wanted and they perceived that they can lose their weight by joining weight loss group.

In our study, more than 80% of respondents realized that they do not have enough exercises which is one of the causes for their obesity. The study of Fagan, Diamond, Myers and Gill [15] also mentioned that obese and overweight adolescents perceived to lose their weight with exercise.

The combination of diet, exercise, healthy lifestyle changes, and behavioural modification are the most effective way for the weight-loss programs. Many researchers have tried to improve long-term weight-loss outcomes by using stronger behavioural techniques, sustaining healthy lifestyle changes, teaching specific skills and is clearly needed related to weight maintenance. Cole et.al [16] study has done for implementation of evidence-based weight loss programs in primary care practice. As little studies in Malaysia on perception and beliefs about healthy lifestyle changes, and behavioural adjustments, our survey was done as a preliminary step to implement the future effective weight loss program in NDUM, Malaysia.

This study has some limitations. The majority of study participants were Malay and may not be representative of more racially diverse populations. A relatively small size of the sampled population

was an another limitation. A larger population including other Universities would be rendered a more realistic and representative statistical calculations. Despite these limitations, we collected and analysed the responses descriptively from selected obese staff identifying as generalizability of our findings.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This survey study highlighted the somewhat information and beliefs in the causes of obesity among the adults in Malaysia. The further study of evidence-based pragmatic approaches on obesity should be done for implementing effective weight loss program.

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