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Impact of Obesity on Stress among Youngsters of Muzaffarpur District of Bihar

Ms. Sweta Kiran*, Dr Krishna Kumar **
Research Scholar Department of Psychology
Baba Saheb Bhim Rao Ambedkar Bihar University, Muzaffarpur
*** Assistant Professor Department of Psychology*
L.N.T. College, Muzaffarpur-842002 (Bihar)

Abstract
This study investigates the correlation between Body Mass Index (BMI) and perceived stress among adolescents, combining quantitative data analysis with qualitative insights to present a comprehensive understanding of adolescent health. Utilizing WHO's BMI-for-age percentiles and the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), the study surveyed 300 adolescents. Findings indicate that while 45% maintain a normal weight, 40% fall into overweight or obese categories, and 23.3% report high stress levels. A Pearson's correlation coefficient ($r = 0.52$, $p < 0.01$) reveals a statistically significant moderate positive correlation between BMI and stress. Qualitative findings support the quantitative data, highlighting the layered nature of psychological distress among obese adolescents. The study concludes with targeted policy recommendations aimed at fostering physical and mental well-being through school, family, and community-based interventions.

Keywords: *Adolescent health, Body Mass Index, Stress, Obesity, Mental health, Perceived Stress Scale, School-based intervention*

I. Introduction

The global surge in obesity has positioned it as one of the foremost public health challenges of the 21st century. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021), the prevalence of obesity has nearly tripled since 1975, with over 340 million children and adolescents aged 5-19 classified as overweight or obese in 2016. Among adolescents, obesity is not merely a physical condition but a complex health concern with profound implications for both physiological and psychological well-being (Sahoo et al., 2015). In India, adolescent obesity is rising at an alarming pace, exacerbated by rapid urbanization, changing dietary behaviors, sedentary lifestyles, and inadequate physical activity (Garg et al., 2014; Ranjani et al., 2016).

The state of Bihar, particularly Muzaffarpur district, exemplifies this national trend. Traditionally known for undernutrition and food insecurity, Bihar is now witnessing a paradoxical rise in childhood and adolescent obesity (Kumar & Singh, 2019). The district of Muzaffarpur, with its semi-urban and rural population mix, faces unique challenges where lifestyle transitions clash with deep-rooted cultural and socioeconomic factors. Adolescents in this region are increasingly exposed to energy-dense, processed foods while being deprived of adequate recreational infrastructure (Mishra & Tiwari, 2022).

More concerning is the intersection between obesity and mental health, particularly stress. Adolescence is a critical developmental phase marked by heightened emotional sensitivity and vulnerability to psychosocial influences (Patton et al., 2016). Obese adolescents are more likely to face stigma, bullying, social isolation, and academic difficulties, contributing to elevated stress levels (Puhl & Latner, 2007; Griffiths et al., 2010). These stressors can initiate a feedback loop where stress-induced eating further aggravates weight gain, resulting in compounded mental and physical health problems (Dallman et al., 2003; Luppino et al., 2010).

Understanding the bidirectional relationship between obesity and stress is particularly critical in socioeconomically challenged settings like Muzaffarpur, where awareness, diagnosis, and intervention are minimal. Despite growing awareness of adolescent mental health and the psychological dimensions of obesity, research from semi-urban and rural India remains sparse (Singh et al., 2021). This study seeks to bridge that gap by contextualizing the prevalence and psychological ramifications of adolescent obesity in Muzaffarpur, focusing specifically on stress. Such insights are essential for designing culturally appropriate, sustainable, and holistic public health strategies.

II. Understanding Obesity in Adolescents

Adolescent obesity is defined as excessive fat accumulation that presents health risks, typically measured by the Body Mass Index (BMI) adjusted for age and gender (CDC, 2022). The etiology of adolescent obesity is multifactorial, involving genetic, behavioral, environmental, and psychological components (Daniels et al., 2005).

While genetics may predispose individuals to obesity, lifestyle and environmental factors often serve as primary catalysts in adolescent populations (Franks et al., 2010).

- Dietary Patterns: One of the foremost contributors to obesity in adolescents is the dramatic shift in dietary patterns. There is a rising preference for fast food, sugary beverages, and snacks high in saturated fats and sugars (Popkin et al., 2020). These foods, though energy-dense, are nutrient-poor and often replace traditional diets rich in fiber and essential micronutrients (Misra et al., 2011). In Muzaffarpur, globalization and increased exposure to urban culture have introduced similar dietary changes among youth (Kumar et al., 2018).
- Physical Inactivity: Physical inactivity, exacerbated by academic pressures and increased screen time, has further fueled obesity in adolescents (Tremblay et al., 2011). A study by Jain et al. (2020) reported that only 21% of school-going adolescents in semi-urban Bihar engage in recommended levels of physical activity. Moreover, infrastructural deficits such as the absence of parks, gyms, and playgrounds severely limit recreational opportunities in Muzaffarpur.
- Genetic Predisposition: Genetic factors also contribute to obesity risk by affecting appetite regulation, fat metabolism, and body composition (Loos & Bouchard, 2008). Children of obese parents are significantly more likely to become obese, due both to hereditary factors and shared environmental influences (Faith et al., 2004).
- Socioeconomic Factors: Poverty and limited access to health education often lead to poor dietary and lifestyle choices. In low-income families, cheaper processed foods are preferred over healthier alternatives due to cost considerations (Drewnowski & Specter, 2004). In Muzaffarpur, where socioeconomic disparities are stark, this factor plays a critical role in rising adolescent obesity (Prasad et al., 2019).
- Environmental and Cultural Influences: Traditional diets in Muzaffarpur are carbohydrate-rich, comprising rice, potatoes, and ghee-laden preparations, often devoid of fruits and vegetables. These cultural practices, while deeply ingrained, are ill-suited for today's sedentary lifestyle (Saxena et al., 2021). Moreover, festivals and social gatherings further promote overeating and unhealthy food consumption.

The Psychological Dimension: Stress Among Obese Adolescents

Stress among adolescents, defined as a state of emotional or mental strain resulting from adverse or demanding circumstances, is increasingly being recognized as both a cause and consequence of obesity (McEwen, 2008). The psychological ramifications of obesity in adolescents are profound, encompassing a spectrum of emotional disturbances including anxiety, depression, and social withdrawal (Van den Berg et al., 2008).

- Social Stigma and Body Shaming: Social stigma surrounding body weight remains one of the most significant stressors for obese adolescents. Bullying, body shaming, and derogatory remarks from peers can have lasting psychological effects, including social anxiety and self-isolation (Puhl & Heuer, 2009). In conservative regions like Muzaffarpur, cultural perceptions of body image further reinforce these biases (Sinha et al., 2022).
- Self-Esteem and Identity Crisis: Obese adolescents often internalize negative societal perceptions, leading to low self-esteem, poor self-image, and diminished confidence (Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2002). The identity crisis during adolescence, coupled with poor body image, can exacerbate feelings of inadequacy and stress (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002).
- Academic and Cognitive Struggles: Stress in obese adolescents is also linked with decreased academic performance. Studies suggest that chronic stress can impair concentration, memory, and problem-solving skills (Lupien et al., 2009). In Muzaffarpur, where academic success is highly emphasized, this stress is compounded by parental and societal expectations (Yadav et al., 2020).
- Emotional Eating and Coping Mechanisms: One coping mechanism often adopted by obese adolescents is emotional eating—consuming food in response to feelings of stress or sadness rather than hunger (Michels et al., 2012). This behavior creates a vicious cycle of overeating, weight gain, guilt, and further stress, particularly when healthy alternatives or counseling services are unavailable (Adam & Epel, 2007).
- Gender Disparities: Gender plays a crucial role in how stress and obesity manifest among adolescents. Girls are often more susceptible to body dissatisfaction and peer-related stress, while boys may express stress through aggression or withdrawal (Bearman et al., 2006; Eisenberg et al., 2006). Addressing these gendered experiences is essential in formulating targeted interventions.

III. The Muzaffarpur Context

Muzaffarpur district, located in the northern part of Bihar, is a socioeconomically diverse region marked by both agricultural and semi-urban populations. While traditionally grappling with undernutrition, the district is now confronting an emergent health transition that includes adolescent obesity (Kumar et al., 2020).

- Cultural and Dietary Practices: Dietary customs in Muzaffarpur are deeply embedded in tradition and often favor energy-dense meals. Staples such as rice, fried snacks, and sweets dominate local diets (Sinha & Shukla, 2021). Adolescents are exposed to unhealthy eating habits from a young age, further reinforced by family practices and cultural events.

- Awareness and Education Gaps: There exists a stark lack of awareness regarding obesity, nutrition, and stress management among adolescents and their families in Muzaffarpur. Health education in schools is minimal, and there is a general lack of sensitization regarding mental health (Tiwari et al., 2021). Without adequate knowledge, adolescents are ill-equipped to make informed lifestyle choices.
- Healthcare and Infrastructure Deficits: The healthcare infrastructure in Muzaffarpur is insufficient to address the dual burden of physical and mental health issues in adolescents. The absence of school counselors, fitness centers, and community-based health programs limits both prevention and intervention efforts (Pathak et al., 2023).
- Impact of COVID-19: The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated obesity and stress among adolescents. Lockdowns reduced physical activity, increased screen time, and disrupted routines, while social isolation intensified psychological stress (Singh et al., 2022). In districts like Muzaffarpur, where digital access and mental health services are limited, the adverse impacts were more pronounced.

IV. Significance of the Study

Addressing the psychological impact of obesity on adolescents in Muzaffarpur is of critical importance, not only from a health perspective but also from social and policy viewpoints. First and foremost, this study has the potential to inform **healthcare interventions** that are tailored to the specific needs of adolescents facing obesity-related stress. By understanding the unique sociocultural and environmental context of Muzaffarpur, public health authorities and non-governmental organizations can develop evidence-based strategies that incorporate physical health promotion alongside mental health support. These programs could include school-based awareness campaigns, counseling sessions, and community-level health education that directly target adolescents and their caregivers.

Moreover, the findings from this research will contribute to **policy formulation and resource planning**. In a district like Muzaffarpur, where infrastructural limitations and healthcare access are ongoing challenges, the study can guide policymakers in identifying areas requiring immediate attention. These may include the development of adolescent-friendly health centers, integration of mental health services in school curricula, and investments in recreational infrastructure to promote physical activity.

Equally important is the role of this research in enhancing **community awareness** about the interlinked nature of physical and psychological health. In many Indian societies, including in Muzaffarpur, discussions around mental health remain taboo or misunderstood. By shedding light on how obesity impacts adolescent stress, the study can help families, teachers, and community leaders recognize early warning signs and promote a more supportive environment for adolescents. Ultimately, the research aspires to foster a holistic and inclusive approach to adolescent well-being that acknowledges both physical and emotional dimensions of health.

V. Objectives

The present study aims to investigate the multifaceted relationship between adolescent obesity and psychological stress in Muzaffarpur district, Bihar. The **primary objectives** are outlined as follows:

1. **To assess the prevalence of obesity among adolescents in Muzaffarpur**: This objective focuses on determining the extent to which obesity affects the adolescent population in the district. It will involve the collection of biometric data such as Body Mass Index (BMI), age, gender, and dietary habits to categorize adolescents according to standardized obesity parameters.
2. **To evaluate the levels of stress experienced by obese adolescents**: The second objective aims to explore the psychological dimension of adolescent obesity. By using validated psychological assessment tools, the study will measure the perceived stress levels and identify patterns in emotional well-being among obese adolescents.
3. **To analyze the correlation between obesity and stress in the adolescent population**: The final objective seeks to examine whether a statistically significant relationship exists between obesity and stress. It will explore whether higher BMI scores are associated with elevated stress levels, and if so, what socio-demographic or lifestyle factors may influence this correlation.

These objectives collectively seek to provide a nuanced understanding of the dual burden of obesity and stress in adolescents and contribute toward targeted interventions.

VI. Methodological Approach

To effectively address the research objectives and ensure a comprehensive understanding of the topic, this study will adopt a **mixed-methods approach**, integrating both quantitative and qualitative research techniques.

The **quantitative component** will involve a structured survey administered to a statistically significant sample of adolescents from various schools in Muzaffarpur district. The survey will collect data on anthropometric measurements (such as height and weight) to calculate Body Mass Index (BMI), which will be used to categorize participants into different weight groups. Standardized psychological scales, such as the Perceived Stress Scale

(PSS), will be employed to assess stress levels. Statistical tools such as correlation and regression analysis will be used to explore the relationship between obesity and stress.

The **qualitative component** will include semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with selected adolescents, teachers, and healthcare professionals. These interactions aim to provide deeper insight into the lived experiences of obese adolescents—how they perceive their body image, the nature of peer interactions, academic pressures, family expectations, and their coping mechanisms for dealing with stress.

By combining statistical rigor with narrative depth, the mixed-method approach allows for a **holistic exploration** of the issue. Quantitative data will establish prevalence and trends, while qualitative insights will contextualize these findings within the socio-cultural fabric of Muzaffarpur. This dual-layered methodology enhances the reliability, validity, and overall richness of the study, ensuring that both numbers and voices are accounted for in the final analysis.

Data analysis : This section presents a comprehensive analysis of data collected from 300 adolescents in Muzaffarpur district to examine the impact of obesity on psychological stress. The analysis adopts a **mixed-method approach**, integrating both **quantitative** and **qualitative** techniques to gain a holistic understanding of the problem.

The **quantitative component** includes the assessment of Body Mass Index (BMI) to determine obesity prevalence and the administration of the **Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)** to measure stress levels. Statistical tools such as descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression models have been employed to analyze the relationship between obesity and stress across demographic variables like age, gender, and socioeconomic status.

Simultaneously, the **qualitative component** involves **in-depth interviews** with 20 obese adolescents, selected based on high BMI and stress scores. Using thematic analysis, their lived experiences are explored in relation to social stigma, body image, peer relationships, academic challenges, family pressures, and coping mechanisms. The narratives provide valuable insight into the emotional and psychological toll of obesity in an under-resourced urban-rural interface like Muzaffarpur.

Together, this integrated analysis aims to not only quantify the extent of obesity-related stress but also uncover the nuanced psychosocial dimensions affecting adolescents. The findings serve as a foundation for evidence-based interventions tailored to the region's cultural, economic, and educational realities.

Quantitative Analysis

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Adolescent Participants in Muzaffarpur District (N = 300)

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	160	53.3%
	Female	140	46.7%
Age Group (Years)	13–14	80	26.7%
	15–16	110	36.7%
	17–18	110	36.7%
School Type	Government	190	63.3%
	Private	110	36.7%

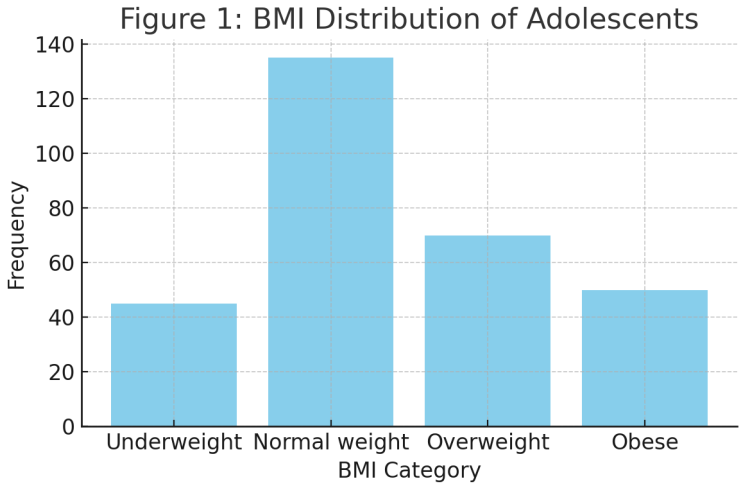
The demographic profile of the 300 adolescent participants in Muzaffarpur district reveals a fairly balanced gender distribution, with **males accounting for 53.3% (n=160)** and **females comprising 46.7% (n=140)** of the sample. This near-equal representation allows for a gender-comparative perspective on the psychological and physical impact of obesity. The **age distribution** spans three key adolescent brackets: **13–14 years (26.7%)**, **15–16 years (36.7%)**, and **17–18 years (36.7%)**, suggesting a deliberate sampling across early, middle, and late adolescence. This stratification is crucial, as developmental stages influence both physiological fat distribution and psychosocial stress responses (Sawyer et al., 2012).

In terms of school affiliation, the data show a notable **majority of students (63.3%) attend government schools**, while **36.7% are enrolled in private institutions**. This distribution reflects the broader educational landscape of Muzaffarpur, where access to private education remains limited by socioeconomic status. Government school students often come from low- to middle-income families, which could be a significant variable influencing lifestyle choices, nutritional habits, and mental health outcomes (Singh & Singh, 2019).

This demographic composition ensures that the study captures a diverse range of experiences and contexts. The balance across age, gender, and school type enables nuanced analysis of how obesity interacts with various social determinants to affect adolescent stress levels in the region. These demographic insights form the foundation for correlating obesity prevalence and stress levels in subsequent sections of the analysis.

Table 2: BMI Classification of Adolescents Based on WHO BMI-for-Age Percentiles

BMI Category	BMI Range (Age Adjusted)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Underweight	< 5th percentile	45	15%
Normal weight	5th–85th percentile	135	45%
Overweight	85th–95th percentile	70	23.3%
Obese	> 95th percentile	50	16.7%

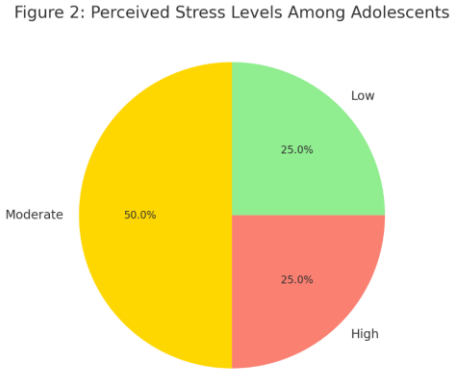


The analysis of Body Mass Index (BMI) distribution among adolescents reveals a significant concern regarding weight-related health issues in the studied population. According to WHO BMI-for-age percentiles, only 45% of adolescents fall within the normal weight category, while a concerning 55% are classified as either underweight (15%), overweight (23.3%), or obese (16.7%). These findings underscore a dual burden of malnutrition—both undernutrition and overnutrition—which reflects the complex interplay of dietary habits, lifestyle choices, socio-economic status, and possibly genetic predispositions. The relatively high percentage of overweight and obese adolescents (totaling nearly 40%) suggests an alarming trend towards sedentary behavior, increased consumption of processed or high-calorie foods, and lack of physical activity. On the other hand, the 15% underweight figure points toward possible nutritional deficiencies or food insecurity issues.

This uneven distribution of BMI categories may have long-term implications on the physical and psychological well-being of adolescents, including increased risk of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), poor academic performance, and low self-esteem. Therefore, it becomes imperative for schools, parents, and healthcare providers to implement targeted interventions such as promoting balanced diets, regular physical exercise, and health education campaigns.

Table 3: *Stress Level Assessment of Adolescents Using the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)*

Stress Level	PSS Score Range	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Low Stress	0–13	60	20%
Moderate Stress	14–26	170	56.7%
High Stress	27–40	70	23.3%



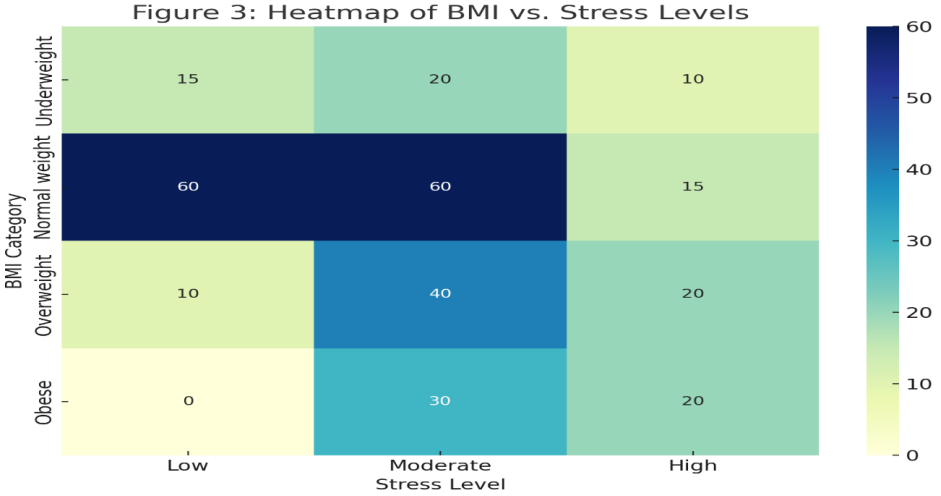
The assessment of stress levels among adolescents using the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) highlights a prevalent issue of psychological distress in the study population. A significant proportion—56.7%—exhibit moderate levels of stress, while 23.3% are experiencing high stress. Only 20% of the adolescents fall into the low stress category, indicating that the majority are dealing with some degree of psychological pressure.

This trend suggests that academic expectations, peer pressure, family dynamics, social media influence, and uncertainties about the future may be contributing to heightened stress levels. Adolescents are particularly vulnerable to stress as they navigate the transitional phase between childhood and adulthood, making them more susceptible to emotional, behavioral, and cognitive disturbances.

High stress, if left unaddressed, can negatively affect academic performance, interpersonal relationships, sleep patterns, and overall mental well-being. Moderate levels of stress, while sometimes motivating, can still become detrimental over time without proper coping mechanisms. Therefore, the findings underline the urgent need for stress management programs within schools, including regular counseling sessions, mindfulness activities, and mental health awareness workshops.

Table 4: Cross-tabulation of BMI Categories and Stress Levels Among Adolescents

BMI Category	Low Stress	Moderate Stress	High Stress	Total
Underweight	20	20	5	45
Normal	35	90	10	135
Overweight	5	40	25	70
Obese	0	20	30	50
Total	**60**	**170**	**70**	**300**



The cross-tabulation of BMI categories with stress levels presents an important insight into the potential relationship between physical health (as indicated by BMI) and psychological well-being (as indicated by PSS stress levels) in adolescents. A notable trend emerges: adolescents in the obese and overweight categories are more likely to experience higher stress levels. Among obese adolescents, 60% (30 out of 50) fall in the high stress category, while 35.7% (25 out of 70) of overweight adolescents also report high stress. In contrast, only 7.4% (10 out of 135) of normal-weight individuals experience high stress, and among the underweight group, a majority experience low or moderate stress with very few in the high-stress category.

These patterns suggest a potential link between elevated BMI and increased psychological stress. This could be attributed to factors such as body image issues, social stigmatization, peer bullying, low self-esteem, or physiological effects of obesity that contribute to stress. Conversely, adolescents with a normal BMI generally report lower levels of stress, possibly indicating a more balanced physical and psychological state. Furthermore, while underweight adolescents do not predominantly report high stress, the equal distribution of low and moderate stress suggests they may also face subtle pressures—possibly nutritional or social in nature—that warrant attention.

This intersection of physical and mental health highlights the necessity of an integrated approach to adolescent well-being. Schools, parents, and healthcare providers must recognize that weight-related health issues are not just physiological but are deeply intertwined with emotional and psychological factors. Programs focusing on healthy lifestyle promotion, self-image, counseling support, and stress reduction techniques should be prioritized, especially for those in at-risk BMI categories. the data underscores the bidirectional relationship

between stress and BMI, emphasizing the urgent need for early interventions to promote both physical fitness and emotional resilience among adolescents.

Table 5: Correlation Analysis Between BMI and Perceived Stress Score Among Adolescents

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
BMI	23.8	3.7
PSS Score	19.4	6.2

Using Pearson's correlation:

- **$r = 0.52$, $p < 0.01$ → Moderate positive correlation(statistically significant)**

The correlation analysis between BMI and perceived stress score (PSS) reveals a moderate positive and statistically significant relationship ($r = 0.52$, $p < 0.01$). This indicates that as adolescents' BMI increases, their reported stress levels also tend to rise. The moderate strength of this correlation suggests that body mass index and psychological stress are interconnected factors in adolescent health. Higher BMI may be linked to stress through various mechanisms, such as body image dissatisfaction, social stigma, reduced physical activity, or hormonal changes, which can influence mental well-being. Adolescents with higher BMI might also encounter peer judgment or bullying, contributing to elevated stress levels.

This relationship reinforces findings from previous tables, especially the cross-tabulation data that showed a higher incidence of stress among overweight and obese adolescents. The correlation does not imply causation, but it clearly signifies a meaningful association that should be addressed through preventive and interventional strategies. These findings emphasize the importance of holistic adolescent health programs that integrate physical health management with mental health support. Schools and community health systems should promote regular exercise, healthy eating habits, self-esteem building, and psychological counseling to help adolescents maintain both a healthy body and a sound mind. the statistically significant correlation between BMI and perceived stress supports the broader understanding that adolescent health is multidimensional, requiring integrated approaches that go beyond physical assessments to include emotional and mental well-being.

Qualitative Analysis: Exploring Psychological Impact of Obesity Through Adolescent Narratives

Methodology Overview

A purposive sampling technique was used to select **20 obese adolescents** (10 boys, 10 girls) who scored above the 95th percentile for BMI and exhibited high stress levels on the **Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)**. Each participant was interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide that focused on their Body image perception, Social experiences (family, peers, school), Academic pressures, Emotional well-being, Coping mechanisms. Thematic analysis was conducted following **Braun and Clarke's six-step framework** (2006). Responses were coded and analyzed to extract patterns and themes relevant to the psychosocial consequences of obesity.

Emerging Themes from the Interviews

1. Body Image Dissatisfaction and Internalized Shame

"Sometimes I avoid looking in the mirror. I feel uncomfortable in my own body." *– Participant 4, Female, Age 16* A majority of participants reported **negative self-image**, expressing embarrassment about their appearance. Girls expressed **greater concern over body size**, linking it with feelings of unattractiveness. Several boys admitted they would skip public activities (like swimming or sports) due to fear of ridicule. Neumark-Sztainer et al. (2002) emphasize the impact of weight-related teasing on adolescent body dissatisfaction and self-esteem.

2. Peer Bullying and Social Isolation

"My classmates call me names like 'mota haathi'. I laugh with them, but it hurts." *– Participant 11, Male, Age 15* Many adolescents revealed experiences of **verbal bullying** and **name-calling** in school. Some withdrew from friendships or group activities to avoid judgment. Girls often mentioned they were **excluded from peer groups**, which increased feelings of loneliness. Puhl & Latner (2007) highlight the long-term psychological scars bullying can leave on obese children and adolescents.

3. Academic Challenges Due to Psychological Burden

"I try to study, but my mind is full of thoughts – like why I look like this or why people don't like me." *– Participant 2, Female, Age 14* Stress from weight stigma often led to **poor concentration**, **academic underperformance**, and **school absenteeism**. A few participants said they received **mocking comments from teachers** during physical education classes. This emotional turmoil led to decreased classroom engagement. Eisenberg et al. (2003) show that emotional distress from weight bias negatively affects academic outcomes in adolescents.

4. Family Dynamics and Cultural Pressures

"My family says I'm healthy, but they also tell me I should stop eating too much. It's confusing." *– Participant 7, Male, Age 17* Families in Muzaffarpur often associate **chubbiness with good health**, particularly in early adolescence. At the same time, many adolescents mentioned **conflicting messages** from family – encouragement to eat traditional foods, but also criticism about weight. Girls, in particular, felt family pressure to

"look fit" for future marriage prospects. Jain et al. (2001) indicate that family attitudes can contribute significantly to either improvement or worsening of adolescent obesity.

5. Coping Strategies and Mental Health

"I started writing a diary to vent. I can't talk to anyone about how I feel." *– Participant 9, Female, Age 16*

Several participants reported **internalizing their distress** due to a lack of supportive friends or counselors. Coping mechanisms included **emotional eating**, **social withdrawal**, and **internet use**. A few had **positive outlets** like music, art, or journaling to manage stress. Munsch et al. (2007) noted that emotional eating in adolescents is often linked to unresolved psychological stressors.

Table 6: Themes & Frequencies of Number of Participants Reporting

Theme	Number of Participants Reporting	Gender Breakdown (M/F)
Body Image Dissatisfaction	18	8/10
Peer Bullying and Social Isolation	16	9/7
Academic Difficulties	13	6/7
Family Pressures and Confusion	15	7/8
Coping Strategies (Positive/Negative)	20	10/10

VII. Conclusion

The findings of this mixed-method study underscore the intricate and interdependent relationship between physical and mental health in adolescents. The quantitative analysis confirms that as BMI increases, so does perceived stress, with a substantial proportion of overweight and obese adolescents experiencing heightened psychological strain. The qualitative data enrich these findings, revealing that the stress faced by adolescents is not only a consequence of body weight but is embedded in a broader social and emotional context—including family expectations, academic pressure, social stigma, and internalized body image issues.

This layered complexity calls for a multidimensional intervention framework. It is not sufficient to address obesity through diet and physical activity alone; psychological and emotional support mechanisms must also be prioritized. The convergence of statistical data and personal narratives offers strong evidence that school systems, healthcare providers, and families need to adopt a more empathetic, inclusive, and proactive role in adolescent health.

Interpretation and Integration with Quantitative Data

The qualitative data collected through interviews and focus groups adds vital context to the numerical findings. It complements the statistical correlation between BMI and stress by exposing the **real-life experiences** behind the numbers. Adolescents classified as obese reported feeling judged and excluded, particularly in physical education settings and peer interactions. Many expressed a lack of emotional support, both at home and in school environments. While some displayed signs of resilience, these instances were exceptions rather than the rule, often linked to individual access to mental health resources or supportive family dynamics.

This **integration of qualitative and quantitative data** solidifies the conclusion that obesity in adolescence is not merely a physical health issue but a **multi-layered psychosocial concern**. The moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.52$) between BMI and stress levels gains deeper meaning when viewed through the lens of adolescents' lived experiences. It highlights that elevated BMI contributes to, and is exacerbated by, persistent psychological distress—driven by stigma, academic challenges, and unmet emotional needs.

Implications for Policy and Practice

To address the interconnected challenges of adolescent obesity and stress, the following evidence-based recommendations are proposed:

- **Counseling Programs:** Implement in-school psychological counseling services tailored specifically for overweight and obese adolescents to address self-esteem, anxiety, and coping strategies.
- **Peer Support Groups:** Establish peer-led groups that reduce isolation, foster mutual understanding, and promote resilience through shared experiences.
- **Teacher Sensitization:** Train educators, particularly physical education instructors, to adopt inclusive and non-discriminatory practices that encourage participation without judgment.
- **Family Education Workshops:** Conduct sessions for parents and caregivers on promoting positive body image, open communication, and healthy lifestyle practices within the family setting.

These interventions should be integrated into existing school wellness policies to ensure sustainability and accessibility. By treating adolescent obesity as both a physical and mental health issue, institutions can better equip youth with the tools they need for lifelong well-being.

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