**PARENTAL PERCEPTION OF CHILDHOOD OBESITY AND POTENTIAL DETERMINANTS IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES**

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Objective: We estimated parental perception of their child’s weight status, and its independent predictors in a homogenous Gulf Arab population.

Methods: A representative sample of 1541 students and their parents were randomly recruited from 246 (50% boys) in Abu Dhabi Emirate, UAE. Anthropometric and demographic variables were measured by standard methods. CDC BMI percentile charts for age and sex was used to classify children’s weight. Parental perception of their child’s weight status (underweight, normal, and overweight/ obese) was recorded. We used regression analyses to identify independent predictors.

Results: Of 1331 parents, only 23.4% correctly identified their child’s weight. 71.6% and 5% of parents either-underestimated or over-estimated, respectively. Three variables were found to significantly affect parental identification of a child as obese/overweight, viz. True overweight/obesity status [OR of 22.1 (95% CI 11.2-43.8)], mean parental BMI [OR per kg/m2 of 1.08 (95% CI 1.02-1.15)] with heavier parents perceiving their children as heavier, and though negatively, mother’s education [OR per education category of 0.75 (95% CI 0.57-.98)]. However, neither parental formal educational level and household income, nor children’s age, and sex had any effect on parental perception.

Conclusion: Majority of parents underestimated their child’s weight status. Predictors of correct identification include true children’s BMI, and parental overweight, but not parental formal education, and income or children’s age, and sex. Our results suggest a possible cultural preference of overweight children. Prevention and management strategies should include cultural awareness programs.