



SEACO POLICY BRIEF 006

Obesity Risk in the Transition from Adolescence to Early Adulthood

South East Asia Community Observatory
(SEACO):
Research for a Healthy Community

This research based evidence brief highlights potential policy options

Who is this Policy Brief for?

Policy makers and other stakeholders who are interested to address the problem based on research evidence

Why was it prepared?

To inform stakeholders about health policies and interventions by summarizing the best available research based evidence about the problem

What is Research Based Evidence Brief for Policy?

Research Based Evidence Brief for Policy is generated from the studies implemented by SEACO, an ISO accredited health and demographic surveillance site which acts as a research platform for health related research

Full Publication

The research based evidence is described in detail in the SEACO publication

Pell C, Allotey P, Evans N, Hardon A, Imelda JD, Soyiri I, Reidpath DD. Coming of age, becoming obese: a cross-sectional analysis of obesity among adolescents and young adults in Malaysia. BMC Public Health. 2016;16:1082DOI: 10.1186/s12889-016-3746-x

<https://bmcpublikealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-016-3746-x>

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The Problem:

In Malaysia, obesity rates have increased dramatically over the last 20 years and it now becomes a major public health issue. The transition from adolescence to early adulthood is also recognized as critical for the development of eating and physical activity habits. Evidence is needed whether obesity results from the cumulative effects of years of poor eating patterns and physical inactivity established at a younger age.

Evidence to Support Policy Options:

SEACO's health round survey found that the prevalence of overweight and obesity in the Segamat rural community was 12.8% and 7.9% at ages 16-20 respectively and the prevalence of overweight and obesity was 28.4% and 20.9% at ages 31-35 years respectively. In this study, age was identified as an important factor; one unit increase in age leads to an increased chance of being over-weight and obese.

The study also found that ethnicity is associated with being overweight (BMI 25.0-29.9 kg/m²) and obese (BMI ≥ 30 kg/m²). The Orang Asli recorded the highest prevalence of obesity amongst the ethnic groups (23%), whilst obesity is lowest amongst the Chinese (8%). The lowest level of physical activity was also recorded among the 31 to 35 year old Orang Asli and Indians.

The relationship of obesity to eating out was less clear. The Orang Asli reported the lowest frequencies of eating out (around once a week); whereas the Indian youth ate out approximately six to nine times each week. Several obesogenic factors are found in Segamat; as for example, popular western fast food outlets (KFC, McDonalds, Pizza Hut) which targeted the young people.

Recommendation:

Within the rural community of Malaysia, a greater awareness on the negative effects of poor eating habits and a lack of physical activity needs to be provided. Further focus should be given on the younger population, as they are more vulnerable than other age groups; they need education on good eating and physical activity standards.