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Parental Perception of Childhood Weight Status in a Community-Based Screening Programme

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Introduction:

Childhood obesity is an increasingly alarming health problem, contributing to long-term complications and rising healthcare burden. Despite this, awareness and recognition of childhood obesity within the community remain limited. Parental perception is crucial, as it influences early intervention and engagement in prevention or treatment programmes.

Objective:

To assess parental perception of childhood weight status among parents participating in a community engagement activity.

Methods:

A cross-sectional survey was conducted during the World Obesity and Sleep Day 2026 community event organised by the Endocrine Unit and Department of Otorhinolaryngology, Hospital Putrajaya, at Putrajaya Wetlands on 14 February 2026. During screening activities, parents completed questionnaires assessing perception of their child's weight status and sociodemographic information. Child weight status was determined using standard anthropometric classification and compared with parental perception.

Results:

Twenty-six parents participated, predominantly mothers aged 27–56 years. Over half (56.5%) reported a family history of overweight or obesity. Among participants, 61% had normal BMI, 11.5% were overweight and 27.5% were obese. Parents in the overweight and obese groups were significantly more likely to misperceive their child's weight status ($p=0.001$). Conversely, parents of children with healthy weight were more likely to correctly identify their child's weight category.

Conclusion:

Parental misperception of childhood weight status remains common and represents an important public health concern. Failure to recognise overweight and obesity may delay behavioural modification and healthcare engagement. Improving parental awareness and accurate weight recognition should be prioritised, as realistic perception is the first step toward effective prevention and management of childhood obesity.