Prevalence of overweight and obesity in school-age children

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Abstract

Introduction: Childhood obesity is a public health challenge. Between 1999 and 2012, the prevalence in Mexico of overweight and obesity in schoolchildren went from 25.5 to 32 %. Objective: To report current prevalence of overweight and obesity in schoolchildren from the municipality of Durango, Mexico. Method: Cross-sectional survey conducted between January 2017 and December 2018. A total of 24,600 children aged between six and 11 years from 138 schools of the municipality of Durango were included. The body mass index reference values established by the World Health Organization were used to determine the presence of overweight and obesity. Results: The prevalence of overweight was 19.7 %, of obesity, 16 %, and of overweight and obesity combined, 35.7 %. In the six-year-old group, a prevalence of overweight-obesity of 25.4 % was found, and in the 11-year-old group, 41.1 %. Conclusions: The prevalence of overweight-obesity in children aged from 6 to 11 years in the municipality of Durango is higher than those reported in the national survey by states in 2012 and in the 2016 national survey; a trend towards an increase with age was observed.

KEY WORDS: Obesity. Overweight. School-age children.

Prevalencia de sobrepeso y obesidad en niños escolares

Resumen

Introducción: La obesidad infantil es un reto de salud pública. Entre 1999 y 2012, en México la prevalencia de sobrepeso y obesidad (SO) en niños escolares pasó de 25.5 a 32 %. Objetivo: Reportar la prevalencia actual de SO en niños escolares del municipio de Durango, México. Método: Encuesta transversal realizada entre enero de 2017 y diciembre de 2018. Se incluyeron 24 600 niños de seis a 11 años, de 138 escuelas del municipio de Durango. Se utilizaron los valores de referencia del índice de masa corporal establecidos por la Organización Mundial de la Salud para determinar la presencia de SO. Resultados: La prevalencia de sobrepeso fue de 19.7 %, la de obesidad de 16 % y la de SO de 35.7 %. En el grupo de seis años se encontró una prevalencia de SO de 25.4 % y en el de 11 años, de 41.1 %. Conclusiones: La prevalencia de SO en niños de seis a 11 años del municipio de Durango es más elevada que la reportada en la encuesta nacional por entidad federativa en 2012 y la nacional en 2016; se observó tendencia al incremento en la prevalencia conforme aumenta la edad.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Obesidad. Sobrepeso. Escolares.
Introduction

Although the prevalence of overweight and obesity in children has increased over the past 50 years, both in developing and developed countries, the childhood obesity increase rate is up to 30 % higher in countries with low or moderate income than in those with a high income.1 This has made for childhood obesity to be considered as an emerging global public health problem, with not-yet-determined social and economic consequences.

Children with overweight and obesity generally continue to be obese throughout their lives and are more likely to develop non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disorders, dyslipidemia, and orthopedic, neurological, lung and liver problems.2,3

In Mexico, the prevalence of overweight and obesity in school-age children showed a significant increase between 1999 and 2012: it went from 25.5 to 32 %.4 The results of the 2012 National Health and Nutrition Survey (ENSANUT – Encuesta Nacional de Salud y Nutrición)5 showed that, in the state of Durango, the prevalence of overweight and obesity in children aged from five to 11 years was 33.8 %, and it was higher in boys (37.5 %) than in girls (29.8 %). “Half-Way” ENSANUT in 20166 reported a national prevalence of overweight-obesity of 32.8 % in girls and 33.7 % in boys; in northern Mexico, the prevalence of overweight-obesity in children aged from 5 to 11 years was 29.5 %.

The purpose of this study was to determine the prevalence of overweight-obesity in children who attend primary schools in the municipality of Durango.

Method

After approval of the study by the Research Ethics Committee of the Mexican Institute of Social Security (2016-785-103), and after informed consent was granted by the parents of all participants, a descriptive, cross-sectional study was carried out in collaboration with the National System for Comprehensive Development of the Family of Durango, through the Comprehensive Health program that the state government has implemented in primary schools, which among its actions includes nutritional assessment of the children enrolled in primary schools of the public system.

Between January 2017 and December 2018, all children aged between six and 11 years included in the Comprehensive Health program for that period and who were enrolled in 138 (68.3 %) schools out of a total of 202 located in the municipality of Durango were included.

Previously trained nutrition professionals determined weight and height using scales (Beurer, model MS 50) and portable stadiometers (Seca, model 213). The overweight-obesity diagnosis was established according to the body mass index (BMI) based on the World Health Organization reference tables (BMI Z-values-for-age from five to 19 years).7 According to the number of inhabitants, the localities were classified as urban (more than 2,500 inhabitants) and rural (less than 2,500 inhabitants).

The information was collected in Excel spreadsheets and analyzed with the SPSS statistical program, version 15.

Results

A total of 24,600 children were included in the study, out of which 77.1 % came from urban localities and 22.9 % from rural localities. The prevalence of overweight-obesity was 35.7 % (19.7 % overweight and 16.0 % obesity); in urban schools, the prevalence was 36.7 %, while in rural schools it was 31.7 %.

In urban localities, the prevalence of overweight was higher in girls (21.2 %) than in boys (19.1 %), while the prevalence of obesity was higher in boys (19.2 %) than in girls (14.3 %). A similar pattern was observed in rural areas, with more overweight in girls (18.9 %) than in boys (17.7 %) and higher prevalence of obesity in males (15.0 %) than in females (11.7 %) (Table 1).

When the results were analyzed by age, the prevalence of overweight-obesity was 25.4 % in six-year-old children and 41.1 % in those aged 11 years (Table 2).

Discussion

The prevalence of overweight-obesity in children aged from 6 to 11 years in the municipality of Durango was 35.7 %, which is 1.9 % higher (1.2 % overweight and 0.7 % obesity) than that reported in ENSANUT 20125 (Table 3).

According to Half-Way ENSANUT 2016 data, the national prevalence of overweight-obesity was 33.2%.8 Given that the survey did not provide results by state, the prevalences recorded in our study were compared with those reported in ENSANUT 20125. By gender, the prevalence of overweight-obesity had an increase of 4.5 % in girls, while in boys it decreased by 0.5 %.
Table 1. Prevalence of overweight and obesity by type of locality and gender

| Locality   | Girls                        | Boys                        |
|------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
|            | Normal weight | Overweight | Obesity | Overweight + obesity | Total | Normal weight | Overweight | Obesity | Overweight + obesity | Total |
|            | n       | %       | n       | %       | n       | %       | n       | %       | n       | %       | n       | %       | n       | %       | n       | %       | n       | %       | n       | %       | n       | %       | n       | %       |
| Urban      | 6147    | 64.6    | 2014    | 21.2    | 1358    | 14.3    | 3372    | 35.4    | 9519    | 5829    | 61.7    | 1803    | 19.1    | 1813    | 19.2    | 3616    | 38.3    | 9445    |
| Rural      | 1977    | 69.4    | 537     | 18.9    | 334     | 11.7    | 871     | 30.6    | 2848    | 1876    | 67.3    | 493     | 17.7    | 419     | 15.1    | 912     | 32.7    | 2788    |
| Total      | 8124    | 65.7    | 2551    | 20.6    | 1692    | 13.7    | 4243    | 34.3    | 12367   | 7705    | 63      | 2296    | 18.8    | 2232    | 18.2    | 4528    | 37      | 12233   |

Table 2. Prevalence of overweight and obesity by age

| Age (years) | Girls                        | Boys                        |
|------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
|            | Normal weight | Overweight | Obesity | Overweight + obesity | Total | Normal weight | Overweight | Obesity | Overweight + obesity | Total |
|            | n       | %       | n       | %       | n       | %       | n       | %       | n       | %       | n       | %       | n       | %       | n       | %       | n       | %       | n       | %       | n       | %       |
| 6          | 1640    | 76.1    | 334     | 15.5    | 180     | 8.4     | 514     | 23.9    | 2154    | 1606    | 73.1    | 353     | 16.1    | 237     | 10.8    | 590     | 26.9    | 2196    |
| 7          | 1417    | 69.0    | 372     | 18.1    | 266     | 12.9    | 638     | 31.0    | 2055    | 1437    | 66.7    | 376     | 17.4    | 344     | 15.9    | 720     | 33.3    | 2157    |
| 8          | 1349    | 62.6    | 475     | 22.1    | 330     | 15.3    | 805     | 37.4    | 2154    | 1258    | 63.6    | 346     | 17.5    | 374     | 18.9    | 720     | 36.4    | 1978    |
| 9          | 1338    | 63.9    | 468     | 22.3    | 290     | 13.8    | 758     | 36.1    | 2096    | 1194    | 59.4    | 379     | 18.9    | 435     | 21.7    | 814     | 40.6    | 2008    |
| 10         | 1270    | 61.8    | 463     | 22.5    | 323     | 15.7    | 786     | 38.2    | 2056    | 1153    | 55.9    | 444     | 21.5    | 467     | 22.6    | 911     | 44.1    | 2064    |
| 11         | 1110    | 59.9    | 439     | 23.7    | 303     | 16.4    | 742     | 40.1    | 1852    | 1057    | 57.8    | 398     | 21.7    | 375     | 20.5    | 773     | 42.2    | 1830    |
The increase in the prevalence of overweight-obesity in girls was determined by the significant increase in the prevalence of overweight, which went from 15.9 % to 20.6 % in six years. In boys, overweight decreased by 2 %: from 20.8 %, it went to 18.8 %. The prevalence of obesity in girls decreased by 0.2 %, while in boys, it increased by 1.5 %.

Regarding the type of locality, the prevalence of overweight-obesity increased by 1.2 % (0.6 % overweight and 0.6 % obesity) in urban localities, while in rural areas the increase was 1.7 % (1.9 % overweight and 0.2 % obesity).

When the data were analyzed by age, the prevalence of overweight-obesity was lower at six than at 11 years of age (25.4 and 41.1 %). When the information was broken down by gender, the same trend was observed. This result suggests that, at the time of admission to primary school, one fourth part of the children have overweight or obesity problems, probably related to lifestyle in the family environment and genetic factors (genome and gut microbiome) and to the fact that in schools there are adverse environments that favor the development of overweight and obesity.

In comparison with ENSANUT 2006, which, like our study, provided results by age groups, the fact that the prevalence of overweight-obesity in 11-year-old children (32.5 %) was higher than in those aged five (17.7 %) stood out. Similarly, the prevalence of overweight-obesity in 11-year-old girls was higher (29.5 %) than that of five-year-old girls (21.2 %).

In comparison with ENSANUT 2012, ENSANUT 2006 reported a slight decrease in the prevalence of overweight in girls (16.5 % versus 15.9 %), and thus the prevalence of 20.6 % documented in the present study is the highest observed in the last 12 years in the state.

The increase in the prevalence of overweight in girls should be considered as a warning, since the risk of developing obesity and the comorbidities associated with it increase if this condition continues until adolescence, a stage in which there are changes in the body composition associated with puberty (characterized by a decrease in insulin sensitivity, which promotes an increase in body fat), together with a decrease in regular physical activity and increased intake of foods with higher caloric content.

Even when the problem represented by the high prevalence of overweight-obesity is well documented in schoolchildren, and various nutritional education interventions and physical activity recommendations have been established, these have not been effective for stopping it, which suggests that public policies in this area require substantial modifications.

Access to the entire sample conferred robustness and reliability to the results, as demonstrated by the reduced confidence intervals, which are considerably lower than those obtained in ENSANUT 2006 and 2012. One weakness of our study is that the recorded prevalence might not represent that of other rural populations of the state, due to their proximity to the city of Durango.

Acknowledgements

We sincerely thank the support of Elvira Barrantes de Alispuro, president of the National System for Comprehensive Development of the Family of Durango, and of Rocío Manzano Chaídez, director of the Comprehensive Development of the Family State System, as well as to the personnel assigned to the Comprehensive Health program of the Durango state government, without whose collaboration this work would not have been possible.

Conflict of interests

None

Funding sources

The FIS/IMSS/PROT/1762 and FIS/IMSS/PROT/1762 funds were granted by the Durango State Science and Technology Council for this research, as well as the...
FIS/IMSS/PROT/G17-21727 funding, granted by the Mexican Institute of Social Security.

**Ethical disclosures**

The authors declare that no experiments were performed on humans or animals for this investigation.

**Confidentiality of data.** The authors declare that they followed the protocols of their workplace regarding the publication of third-party data.

**Right to privacy and informed consent.** The authors declare that no patient data appear in this article.

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