

The Attitude of Indian Parents Towards Childhood Obesity: A Review

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ABSTRACT

Childhood obesity is a growing concern worldwide; India has the second-highest number of obese children, after China, about 14.4 million. Indian parents play a significant role in its prevalence. A child has a 50% probability of being obese if one of his parents is obese. Children have an 80% probability of being obese if both the parents are obese. Furthermore, several factors contribute to the high rates of childhood obesity in India, including cultural norms, parental feeding practices, and lack of awareness about healthy lifestyle choices. Children who are obese run the danger of growing up to be obese adults who have long-term health issues. Being overweight can cause problems on a physical and mental level. Additionally, exploring the socio-cultural context surrounding childhood obesity in India is crucial for implementing targeted strategies that promote healthier habits and prevent long-term health. This review paper aims to describe the role of parents in preventing childhood obesity with the help of parents, grandparents, and other caregivers, can reduce childhood obesity.

Materials and methods: More than 30 research papers and reviews were searched in Google Scholar; Research Gate, PubMed to collect relevant secondary data on the particular area.

Result and Conclusion: Several studies have shown that parents play a crucial role in shaping their children's eating habits and physical activity levels. By providing a supportive and healthy home environment, parents can serve as positive role models and promote behaviour that prevents childhood obesity. The exact percentage of parents involved in childhood obesity varies depending on the study and population being examined. However, research consistently shows that parental involvement plays a significant role in the development and prevention of childhood obesity.

Keywords: *Childhood obesity, Role of parents, Body Mass Index, Socio-cultural, Overweight.*

INTRODUCTION

Overweight and obesity are defined as abnormal or excessive fat accumulation that may impair health. Body mass index (BMI), which is modified according to standards based on the child's age and gender, is calculated using the child's height and weight to determine childhood obesity. A BMI falling between the 85th and 94th percentile is classified as "overweight," while a BMI above the 95th percentile for both gender and age falls into the "obese" category³. In recent years between 2011–2012 and 2015–2016, there was an increase in the prevalence of obesity among children

between the ages of 2–5 and 16–19³. Compared to peers who maintain a healthy weight, children and adolescents who are fat have a five-fold increased risk of becoming obese adults.

Obesity in Indian scenario

India is facing an alarming prevalence of childhood obesity, a problem that requires immediate and comprehensive attention. India has the second-highest number of obese children worldwide, after China, at 14.4 million. Every child's childhood age is a crucial time in their life because it establishes the groundwork for a healthy adulthood. So, the responsibility of people surrounding children is to provide a healthy environment for children.

Aetiology of Childhood Obesity

- **Genetics:** Children of obese or overweight parents are more likely to become obese or overweight themselves.
- **Diet:** A bad diet that is low in nutrients, and high in fat and sugar, might cause weight gain.
- **Absence of Exercise:** Not getting enough exercise makes your child obese.
- **Psychological Factors:** Overeating may result from boredom, stress, or sadness and later cause of obesity.

Obesity in Childhood: Health Risks to Consider

- **Diabetes:** Type 2 diabetes, which can include consequences like kidney malfunction, nerve damage, and eye illness, is more likely to develop in children who are obese.
- Obesity raises the risk of heart-related diseases, including *heart disease*.
- Children who are obese are more likely to experience breathing issues such as *asthma*.
- The psychological impact of being overweight or obese on a child's *self-esteem*, self-image, and depression is possible.

Role of parents in childhood obesity

Most research indicates that parenting practices do have a greater impact on kids' health. Another study shows that Parents with obese children were more prone to use both permissive and coercive discipline techniques and to lack confidence in their abilities to influence their children's lifestyle decisions 28. On the other hand, healthy parents whose children were of unhealthy weight were more inclined to use particular tactics to encourage a healthy way of life. The primary cause of obesity in children is an imbalance in energy expenditure and caloric intake. Indians are prone to obesity because of genetics. A child has a 50% probability of being obese if one of their parents is obese. Children have an 80% probability of being obese if both parents are obese on the other hand; environmental factors are mostly responsible for the rapid increase in obesity among children. A shift in diet from traditional meals to "modern" foods high in fat and sugar is a result of economic affluence. Sedentary lifestyles and a decrease in physical activity are the results of urbanization. Additionally, cultural and societal norms play a role in the increasing prevalence of obesity among children in India. Traditional values that once emphasized physical activity and healthy eating habits have been overshadowed by a more sedentary lifestyle and the availability of convenient, processed foods. The ability of children to manipulate adults to do what they wish, or their pester power, increases as family numbers decrease. They can now more readily obtain calorie-dense foods like soda and candies because of this capacity. Similarly, the prevalence of childhood obesity is influenced by the social context of family.

Pressure and limitation

Children are more likely to adopt unhealthy habits and struggle with weight management. Parenting style plays a major role in increasing childhood obesity. Studies have shown that parents who adopt a permissive or neglectful parenting style are

more likely to have children who struggle with obesity. These parenting styles often involve limited supervision and few rules around food choices and physical activity. Additionally, research has found that children of authoritative parents, who provide structure and set boundaries, are less likely to develop obesity as they are taught healthy habits from an early age. A comparative study shows that children with authoritative parenting and authoritarian parents were 35% and 41% more likely to be obese, respectively.

Influence of Parents on Lifestyle and Diet:

Parents have a big influence on what their kids eat, how active they are, and how sedentary they are. Their home environment is a major factor in influencing their current weight. Regretfully, some parents might not give their children enough thought when choosing what to feed them. The obesity pandemic is exacerbated by a shortage of healthful snacks and home-cooked meals. Childhood eating habits have a lasting impact on eating behaviors. Because they have more control over their behavior at this age and there are typically fewer outside influences (school, classmates), parents can have a big impact on their children eating choices. It is more difficult to modify a child's behavior after they start school because most of them have already established their likes and dislikes when it comes to food. Children adoption of healthy lifestyle habits is greatly aided by their parents' positive effects.

Mothers' role as primary caretakers

Mothers are the primary caretakers of children, and their food choices, knowledge about healthy food, and attitudes regarding childhood obesity play a vital role in influencing obesity in children. Studies reveal that when the proportion of breastfeeding moms declines, more babies grow up to be obese and are raised on infant formula. According to the study, the mother's attitudes toward obesity and its

prevention were moderate 5.65 ± 1.87 (56.50%). Their parenting style influences their kids' dietary preferences and physical activity levels. Comparison of study's findings, more than two-thirds of moms (68.6%) do not know the dangers of obesity. According to a few studies, mothers are unable to determine their own child's weight condition even though they are aware of the risks associated with obesity and overweight. Many parents do not think about how their own eating habits and their surroundings affect their children since they think that obesity is a genetic condition that results in excess weight growth.

Parents as Children's' Role Models:

Kids always do what their parents do. When parents eat healthily, it will encourage their children to follow suit. Give them fresh fruit, dried fruit, and fruit juices—all of which are healthful and delicious—instead of chocolate or toffee. Parents can roast makhanas at home or at the market and season them with spices to make them salted instead of buying premade snacks. For children, parents serve as role models. Kids pick up their parents' tendencies. Thus, simply telling them to exercise won't have any effect. When parents lead by example, it will take place. Parents might establish a daily morning program of yoga or other exercises for all household members and a quick stroll in the evening after dinner. This will make it simpler to inspire the child to exercise and to explain to him the value of doing so. It's not required that kids exercise in the same ways as parents or other family members. He is free to engage in whatever physical activity or workout that he chooses, including dancing, swimming, etc.

Conclusion and future direction

In developing childhood obesity, there are many reasons behind it. In the Indian scenario, parents play a vital role in reducing childhood obesity. Both father's and mother's attitudes toward obesity directly affect children's obesity. Changing the view about obesity is very necessary a

healthy child does not mean a chubby boy or girl; there are differences between a healthy and a chubby body. It's essential that parents understand that a child's health is influenced by more than just their appearance or weight. Parents can make more educated decisions for their child's well-being if they are aware of the value of a balanced diet and regular exercise. In an Indian setting, encouraging a positive body image and self-esteem can also help lower childhood obesity.

Some interventional tips for reducing childhood obesity and the role of parents in it:

While parents cannot change their children's genes, they can influence the environment in which they live.

With the help of the following tips:

- **Nutrition:** Limit processed snacks, promote home-cooked food, and serve balanced meals.

- **Physical Activity:** Encourage family fitness routines, outdoor activities, and active play.
- **Screen Time:** Limit your time spent in front of the computer and promote other activities.
- **Positive Reinforcement:** Rather than pointing fingers, appreciate their little improvement in body weight.

For Prevention:

- Promote a diet full of fruits, vegetables, and lean meats.
- Limit children's intake of fast food and sugar-filled beverages.
- Encourage physical activity by playing games, exercising, and playing sports.
- Keep a regular eye on the child's BMI.
- Recall that treating paediatric obesity at an early age can benefit a child's health and well-being in the long run.

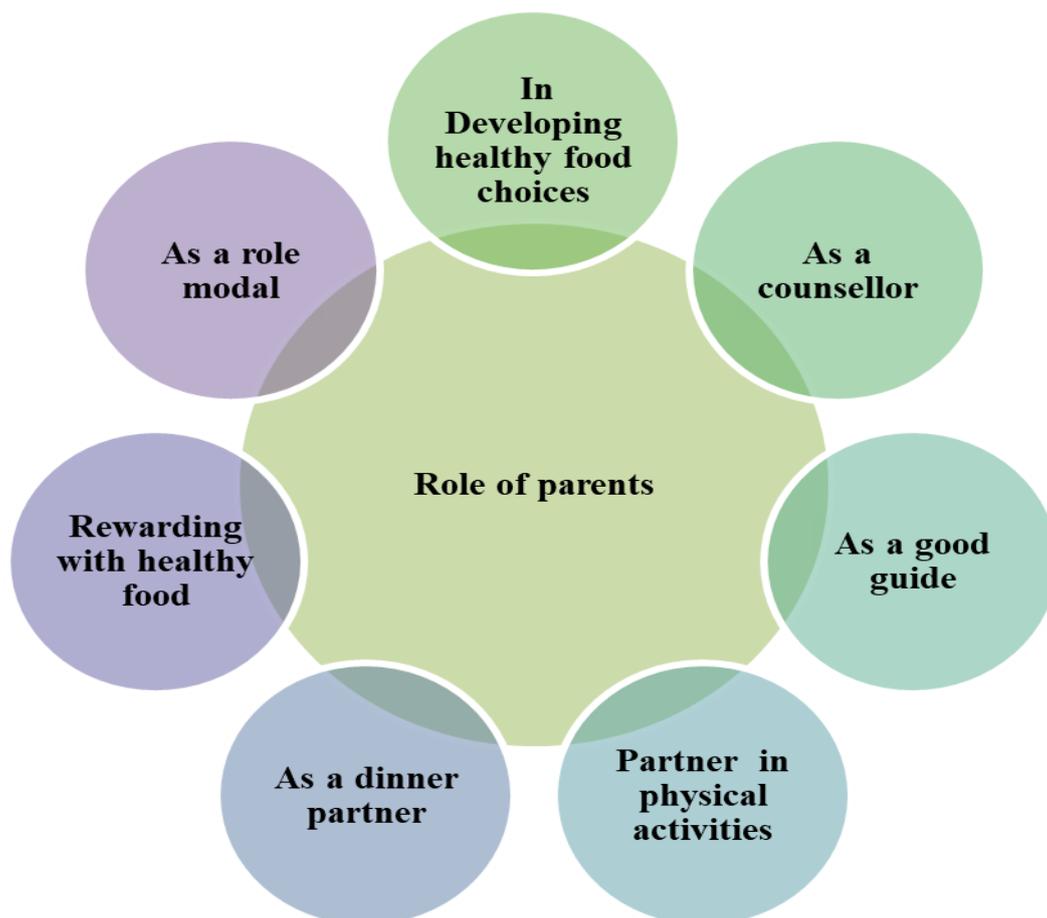


Figure1. Shows the role of parents to overcome obesity in children.

Declaration by Authors

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