Title: Inefficient educational system and obesity related behaviors in adolescents: a qualitative study

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Abstract: Introduction: In any society the educational system plays an influential role on improvement of life style in children and adolescents. Considering the vitality of evaluating and comprehending defects of an educational system with a view to rectifying it, and the limited studies available on the issue, this study aimed at assessing defects of educational system and its effects on obesity-related behaviors from the adolescent's perspective.

Material & Methods: A grounded theory approach was used for analyzing the participants' experiences, and their perceptions. To collect data, 21 personal interviews and 7 semi-structured focus group discussions were conducted with 51 overweight or obese adolescents. Based on open sampling, with the aim of maximal variation of the participants' experiences, two demographically diverse areas from the north and south of Tehran were selected and then followed with theoretical sampling. All the focus group discussions were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Data collection and analysis were done simultaneously using the Strauss and Corbin analysis method.

Results: Based on participant experiences, a "single dimensional curriculum of schools", characterized by lesson-based curriculum, burdensome educational programs, and lack of training in essential skills such as problem solving and stress management lead adolescents to obesity-related behaviors. Not allocating enough time for physical activity in school curriculums and time constraints resulting from overload of homework all resulted in an inactive lifestyle for adolescents. In addition, from the adolescents' perspective, "inefficient public education" because of its weak content, inappropriate media used and lack of comprehensive educational program was the other contributing factor to their obesity-related behaviors. Another reason for inefficient educational system was the contradictory messages reaching adolescents through "misleading advertisements", which resulted in more computer games and consumption of high calorie foods in this age group.

Discussion & Conclusion: Inefficient educational system causes by factors such as the single dimension educational structure of schools, inefficient public education and misleading advertisements all resulted in obesity-related behaviors and consequently weight gain in adolescents.

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