

# RISK FACTORS, LIFESTYLE AND HEALTH HABITS OF YOUNG ADULTS IN QATAR

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## **Abstract**

### Background & Objectives

The state of Qatar has witnessed significant lifestyle changes due to rapid urbanization, the introduction of labour-saving devices and the availability of high-caloric density food. This has impacted on the daily lifestyle and health habits of young adults leading to significant increases in non-communicable diseases (WHO, 2014). This study explored the risk factors associated with such diseases amongst young adults in Qatar.

### Methods

A representative sample of 732 males and females (aged 18-25 years) from Qatar University took part in this cross-sectional, mixed-method design study. Physical Activity (PA) and dietary habits were assessed using a validated questionnaire. Total energy expenditure per week was calculated based on the metabolic equivalent values of each activity reported by the participant (Al-Nakeeb et al., 2012). Body Mass Index (BMI) was calculated according to the International Obesity Task Force criteria and using the age and gender-specific BMI classification established by Cole et al. (2000).

### Results

The percentage of overweight/obesity in males and females was 39.5% and 38.5% respectively. It was evident that there was a significant increase in the percentage of students classified as overweight/obese from year 1 to year 4. Meanwhile, there was a decline in the level of PA and an increase in sedentary time during that period. Whilst health was reported to be the main reason for participation in PA/sport, lack of available time was singled out as the main barrier to engagement in an active lifestyle. Ironically, students reported more than 4 hours of TV/DVD viewing and internet use per day.

### Conclusions

The adoption of healthier lifestyles amongst the Qatari population, including an increase in PA and a reduction in overweight/obesity are major objectives cited in Qatar Vision (2030). This study has revealed a high prevalence of overweight/obesity amongst male and female university students with regressive trends in their lifestyle and health habits. The findings reveal a worrying picture of young people's lifestyle that ought to be a cause for concern for policy makers and health professionals. Undoubtedly, there is an urgent need to seriously consider putting in place intervention strategies