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Exploring perceived hurdles to physical activity engagement among obese students

Exploración de los obstáculos percibidos para la participación en la actividad física entre estudiantes obesos

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Abstract

Obesity, as one of the prevailing concerns faced by a multitude of individuals across the globe, poses a significant and staggering health issue, particularly for students. This qualitative inquiry is yielded in exploring the perceived challenges and hindrances faced by obese students in participating in physical activities. A semi-structured interview was conducted among 75 students using purposive sampling. Detailed and comprehensive data analysis is treated using Braun and Clarke's Thematic Analysis. Three themes were formulated: (1) Obese Students' Perspectives on Participating in Physical Activities, (2) Obese Students' Physical Activity Participation: Is it Empowering or Detrimental, and (3) Perceived Challenges and Hindrances on Physical Development among Obese Students. These findings submerged the fact that physical and psychological barriers were prevalent among obese students' PA participation. Further research is needed to profoundly investigate the underlying factors within the context of this study.

Keywords: physical activity, school physical education, obesity, fitness.

Resumen

La obesidad, como una de las preocupaciones predominantes que enfrentan una multitud de personas en todo el mundo, plantea un problema de salud significativo y asombroso, en particular para los estudiantes. Esta investigación cualitativa se realizó al explorar los desafíos y obstáculos percibidos que enfrentan los estudiantes obesos al participar en actividades físicas. Se realizó una entrevista semiestructurada entre 75 estudiantes utilizando un muestreo intencional. El análisis detallado y completo de los datos se trata utilizando el análisis temático de Braun y Clarke. Se formularon tres temas: (1) Perspectivas de los estudiantes obesos sobre la participación en actividades físicas, (2) Participación en actividades físicas de los estudiantes obesos: ¿empodera o perjudica? y (3) Desafíos y obstáculos percibidos en el desarrollo físico entre los estudiantes obesos. Estos hallazgos sumergieron el hecho de que las barreras físicas y psicológicas prevalecían entre la participación en la actividad física de los estudiantes obesos. Se necesita más investigación para investigar profundamente los factores subyacentes dentro del contexto de este estudio.

Palabras clave: actividad física, educación física escolar, obesidad, fitness.

Introduction

In recent years, health as one of the precious things an individual possesses has drastically changed and altered due to several factors. Across the globe, various diseases and implications have surfaced, potentially declining and affecting an individual's health. This can be traced to several reasons, which include lifestyle. An array of lifestyles is practiced across all ages, which impacts their health and way of life. A sedentary lifestyle has emerged as one of the leading causes of death worldwide. It also brought numerous

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health issues and complications, which cause diseases that affect the majority of the world's population.

Individuals across the globe are experiencing health issues that pose numerous dilemmas for their health. Studies across the context are conducted to look at the causes of this detrimental effect on an individual's health, and it was found that obesity is one of the root causes of this health issue. As defined by Purnell (2023), obesity develops when the risk of unfavorable health effects rises due to the accumulation of excess fat internally and externally and in organs as ectopic lipids. Fat distribution inside the body should be equal. At the same time, some people possess a vast amount of fat inside their bodies, which makes them obese or overweight—having said that, numerous parameters are used to assess an individual's body composition. The lens Sweeting (2015) stated that obesity is characterized as having too much body fat or adipose tissue; this, not weight, is linked to comorbid disorders. The mentioned definition provides a clearer view of the physiological attributes of obesity that could potentially be considered as a chronic disease.

In line with this health dilemma, data across the literature have projected that the obesity rate is gradually increasing. Cawley et al. (2013) reported that between 1965 and 2000, the percentage of American elementary pupils who were obese nearly doubled. In America, 18.0% of children aged 6 to 11 are obese, and 32.6% are overweight as of 2009–2010. According to the U.S. Surgeon General, childhood obesity is an “epidemic” with serious adverse health effects, such as Type 2 diabetes and vascular disease, which significantly increase young people's costs for healthcare. To corroborate, Li et al. (2017) stated that over the past 20 years, there has been a significant rise in European contexts. Meanwhile, in Italy, as reported by Lobstein et al. (2015), obesity has become more common in European children over the past several decades. Subsequently, according to a study by Florentino (2017), the prevalence of overweight and obesity increased by 49.5% across the Asia-Pacific area.

Subsequently, Statista (2022) conducted a survey in the Philippines between July 2021 and June 2022 and found that 38.6% of adults between the ages of 20 and 59 were classified as overweight or obese. Type 2 diabetes, hypertension, stroke, and other serious illnesses are among the ailments that obesity raises the risk of contracting. As a result,

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additional studies on this topic could aid in developing new safety measures and policies that could help mitigate and minimize the obesity rate and its effects, which hurdle participation in physical activity among students. Through this, the researcher seeks to understand the lived experiences of obese students in participating in physical activities. Nowadays, obesity, which is accepted as an essential problem all over the world, continues to increase despite prevention studies. Although it varies according to countries and regions, it has been in a significant increase trend. Regarding physical education, some students lack interest in physical activities due to their body composition or lack of self-confidence to participate in those different activities. Physical Activity is the most effective way to prevent physical and mental illness. Somehow, every college and school provide better Physical Activities for their students, but still, many students have gained weight even though the schools offer some good facilities for their health. As found by Bianco et al. (2018), physical activity provides people with physical health benefits, such as improved functional capacity, decreased risks of diseases, improved body composition, and weight loss. Somehow, the potential benefits of physical activity are on objective health indices, but few studies have focused on subjective indices, including life satisfaction and happiness. In addition, few studies have compared the effects across the lifespan. Therefore, the first purpose of this study was to investigate the relationships between physical activity and life satisfaction and happiness in young, middle-aged, and older adults while controlling for demographic variables. Moreover, the relationship between obesity and Physical Education has a few research. It can produce better studies about the effectiveness of Physical Education through the students' or other people's performance (Yu & Jee, 2020).

Correspondingly, as seen by Rukavina et al. (2019), obese students could have physical restrictions that prevent them from participating in physical activities, such as a lack of endurance for common running sports or activities or a lack of ability to support their body weight on a climbing wall and pushups. Due to their size and weight, some obese students are experiencing difficulties with their performance in their Physical Education classes. These hindrances make the attainment of a healthy lifestyle more difficult. Significantly, Pradinuk et al. (2014) state that physical inactivity among the youth and the population as a whole could lead to obesity and overweight. This data

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shows that the negative effect of physical inactivity, the same as the sedentary lifestyle and nutrition among the students, leads to a ballooning in the obesity rate globally. Physical Education practitioners are now challenged on how to counterattack this health dilemma. Therein, an urgency to develop new ways, methods, and even strategies is needed to reduce and mitigate obesity among students. It is essential to consider various physical activities that can be employed to lower the risk of obesity.

In tradition, Physical education symbolizes the motor development of the students. Moreover, there will be a lack of research about the effectiveness of the participants' weight situation. In Spain, the goal of physical education is to enhance motor skills. However, the effectiveness and the impact of Physical Education on the weight loss of students have never been examined. (Cooney et al., 2020). Moreover, studies show that BMI indicates a better Physical activity to a person. It may indicate proper and accurate activities for a person. It will measure a person's physical activities and ability to absorb the necessary foods (Parmar & Ghayal 2022).

Across the globe, many young students have succumbed to the detrimental effects of obesity on their health and well-being. As found out by The GBD 2015 Obesity Collaborators (2017), a growing number of chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes mellitus, chronic renal disease, various malignancies, and a variety of musculoskeletal ailments, are at increased risk due to obesity. On the other hand, it can be caused by a lack of physical activity, genetic composition, and lifestyle. Obesity can also be seen as a health emergency and a global epidemic, as tagged by medical professionals. Subsequently, obesity has drastically affected the psychological well-being of an individual; one could potentially lose self-confidence and awareness of the person who experienced it. This statement is supported by the study conducted by Fabricatore and Wadden (2014), which states that obesity is an intricate condition linked to a wide range of medical maladies. Certain obese persons are more likely to experience psychiatric disorders, particularly depression. Having this in mind, physical educators, as pushers of health and well-being, are challenged to deplete the chaotic effects of obesity among young students.

Furthermore, physically illiterate students manifest low levels of confidence, competence, and motivation, which leads them to hardly engage in game-based activities

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with their peers, causing a drastic reduction in both qualitative and quantitative physical activity. It will be hard to indicate and manifest if the student does not want to engage in physical activity outside the school. In the case of an unhealthy weight status, the student shall participate in Physical Activities. They participate to aim for higher grades, not to enjoy or appreciate the beauty of physical activities (Howells & Sääkslahti, 2019).

To date, in terms of the Philippine and Asian context, minor literature and studies have been published. In contrast, most studies are published by researchers from American and European contexts. As a result, additional studies on this topic could aid in developing new safety measures and policies that could help mitigate and minimize the obesity rate and its effects, which hurdle participation in physical activity among students. Moreover, this study aims to elevate health awareness among students to prevent the emergence of chronic and non-chronic diseases that a sedentary lifestyle, poor health awareness, and unhealthy ways of living may cause.

Methods

Research Design

This study used qualitative research to present a framework and provide an in-depth and interpreted understanding of students' concepts, experiences, and opinions on the hurdles they have experienced in partaking in physical activities. According to Bhandari (2021), qualitative research is well-suited to better understand concepts, experiences, and opinions by collecting and evaluating non-numerical data to gain a deeper understanding of a topic and generate new research ideas. Correspondingly, according to Aspers and Corte (2019), qualitative research is an iterative process in which the scientific community gains a better understanding of the phenomenon studied by making new significant distinctions as a result of getting closer to the phenomenon.

Meanwhile, Hassaji (2015) mentioned that descriptive qualitative research is holistic and typically requires a rich accumulation of information from many source materials to gain a deeper understanding of the participants, including their opinions, perspectives, and attitudes. Similarly, according to Chafe (2017), descriptive qualitative design is an effective strategy for addressing critical issues that focus on contributing to change and quality improvement in the practice context rather than gaining theoretical or

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conceptual understanding. Therefore, descriptive qualitative design is best suited to providing an in-depth and interpreted understanding of the hurdles faced by the students in partaking in physical education.

Participants and Sampling Technique

There are 75 participants, 308 senior high school students from a higher educational institution residing in Pampanga, Philippines. The participants will be garnered using Taro Yamane's sampling formula, calculated with the $75=308/(1+308(0.10)^2)$. Participants of this study will be chosen based on the criteria and guidelines set by the researchers. The requirements include the student's BMI, whereas the student's weight and height are assessed and evaluated. Students with a BMI classification of 30.0 and above will be listed as prospective participants in the study. Additionally, as part of the criteria, the researchers will also ask for the attendance of the participants coming from their physical education instructor to evaluate their class attendance and participation in physical activities.

Correspondingly, purposive sampling is utilized in this study to corroborate the set guidelines and criteria of the respondents. According to Campbell et al. (2020), purposive sampling is a planned technique to acquire a representative sample by concentrating on a population pertinent to the study's goals. In this study, purposive sampling will significantly aid in determining the participants' lived experiences, opinions, and points of view regarding the hurdles they have encountered in partaking in physical activities in their respective physical education classes.

Instrument

In this qualitative study, the researchers' primary instrument for gathering data was an open-ended questionnaire. Creswell et al. (2018) stressed the value of a well-structured interview guide to effectively steer the discourse, viewing interviews as a “communication act where the researcher is a main actor.” Through this, the researchers can get a deeper understanding of the phenomenon through the lens of the participants. The following questions were asked in an interview using an open-ended questionnaire: (1) to find out what the obese students' life experiences were like when they participated

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in physical activities, and (2) to find out what obstacles they faced and how they affected their physical health. The open-ended questionnaire let the researchers collect genuine answers and decipher participants' difficulties when engaging in physical activities.

Data gathering procedures

To obtain data coming from the participants, the researchers have come up with the following procedures:

Phase 1: Securing Authorization to Conduct the Study

The research began with creating a letter of consent and authorization addressed to the school head and principal to ask for their humble approval in authorizing this study, as per academic protocol, requesting permission to interview regarding determining the hurdles of obese students in partaking in physical activities. In light of their status as partners in the study rather than simply recipients of information, participants were given informed consent about the study's intent and goals, the rationale for conducting the research, and its confidentiality to ascertain that they are well informed and wary of their essential role on this study.

Phase 2: Seeking Consent from the Participants

Considering the academic protocol, a letter seeking consent is crafted and later disseminated to the participants of this study. This ensures awareness and provides participants with information about their pivotal role in the research process. If there are minor participants aged 17 and below, a letter of consent will be sent to their guardians and parents to ensure that the latter agree and authorize the participants to partake in the data-gathering procedure and the research process. Henceforth, the participants can withdraw at any time without terrorizing them. The participants can rest assured that their data are treated with complete anonymity and confidentiality at all costs.

Phase 3: Distribution and Collection of Survey Questionnaire

In terms of the data collection and distribution. The open-ended questionnaire is administered in two ways: online and onsite. For the onsite distribution, this research

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communicated beforehand and scheduled a meeting based on the availability of the participants without interfering with their class schedule; this is to ensure that there will be no interruption and other barriers that can barricade the data-gathering procedure. Meanwhile, in case of class interruption or any other circumstances, the researchers utilized the online platform Google Forms to distribute and synergize with the data coming from the participants. The instrument is sent to the participants' respective e-mail accounts. The participants are given ample time to respond and comprehend the questionnaires on both data-gathering modalities. This is done to secure the richness of data coming from them.

Phase 4: Interview Schedule

This research seeks the participants' availability and most complimentary time in line with the data-gathering procedure. Since the participants are Senior High School students, the researchers will ask the latter's schedule to guarantee their availability without intervening on their schedule and time to do their schoolwork. After ensuring their availability, the researchers interviewed in a vacant room or office after class, during the break, or during the participants' available time. Since there are 75 participants in this study, the researchers utilized a weeklong interview schedule to accommodate the participants. Accordingly, this study values all the data coming from the participants inclined with the ethical considerations and the means of preserving and ensuring the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants and their data without exposing them.

Data analysis

The data derived from the participant's responses to the open-ended questionnaires distributed by the participants is methodologically gathered, transcribed, organized, analyzed, and examined, yielding valuable conclusions using Braun and Clarke (2006)'s Thematic Analysis strategy. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), this method is frequently used in qualitative research because it provides insightful and comprehensive results. These key steps include "familiarization, coding the data, generating initial themes, reviewing the themes, naming and defining the themes, and writing the report," (see Figure 1).

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Step 1: Familiarization.

The data will be read several times to ensure it is fully understood to comprehend the phenomenon under investigation.

Step 2: Coding of Data.

After transcribing and fully comprehending the data, coding will be performed to identify the main features of the data.

Step 3: Generate Initial Themes.

Initial themes will be generated after the data is coded, in which initial patterns were identified from the data and serve as the foundation for the thematic analysis.

Step 4: Reviewing the Themes.

The formed themes will be reviewed and validated to improve the analysis's effectiveness and ensure appropriate thematic analysis.

Step 5: Naming and defining the themes.

Appropriate nomenclatures were developed after reviewing the formed themes to describe the collected data.

Step 6: Writing up the report.

A detailed presentation of the themes, subthemes, and categories will be presented, discussed, and supported by literature and direct quotations from the transcribed responses of the participants.

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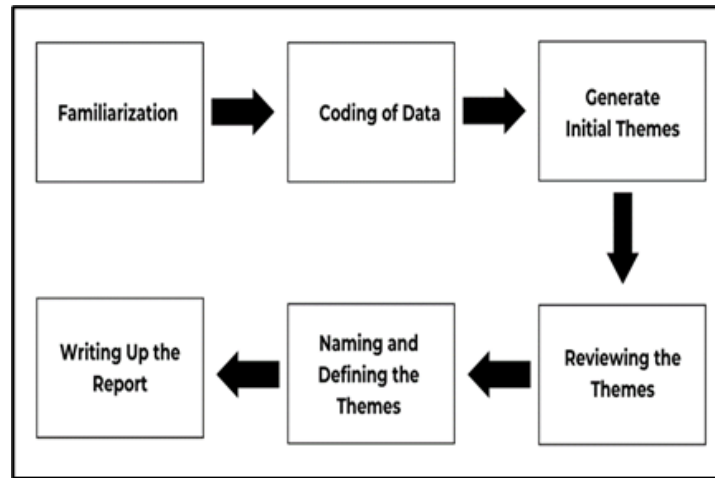


Figure 1. Thematic Analysis Process Flow (Braun and Clarke, 2006)

Aside from the manual coding, this study used the computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA Analytics Pro 2022 to code text segments and facilitate the generation of themes from transcripts in analyzing data from Braun and Clarke's Thematic Analysis strategy. The software examined the codes further and developed relevant subthemes and significant themes concerning the study's objectives.

Ethical considerations

Ethical consideration was one of the most crucial factors the researchers considered when planning this study. Chetty (2016) asserts that ethical issues are crucial to research because they guarantee adherence to disciplinary norms and procedures. To comply with the established ethical standards and preserve participant confidentiality, ethics should also be represented and consulted at every stage of the study process. In the meantime, the researchers confirmed that the Philippine Data Privacy Act of 2012, also known as R.A. 10173, is considered for this study because all participant data is kept private and utilized only for scholarly purposes.

Before beginning the data collection process, the researchers built a connection and a trustworthy relationship with the subjects. To support this, Thompson (2015) noted that building and maintaining rapport and trust with study participants is one of the many ethical considerations a researcher must always make. Given their position as partners of

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the study, participants were given informed consent regarding the purpose and objectives of the study and the justification for its execution, making them collaborators in the research rather than merely information recipients.

Results and Discussion

Theme 1: Obese student's perspectives on participating in physical activities

Participating in physical activities as part of the physical education curriculum boasts staggering effects on the students. By raising energy expenditure, encouraging weight loss, and boosting general well-being, physical activity is essential for improving the health of obese students. Frequent exercise lowers blood pressure and cholesterol, improves cardiovascular health by reducing body fat, and increases insulin sensitivity, which helps control blood sugar. Moreover, exercise promotes mental health by lowering stress and anxiety, building muscular and bone strength, and boosting self-esteem, which results in a more favorable body image.

On some notes, participation in PA serves as an avenue for students to improve their motor skills and as a medium for them to stay fit and healthy. As supported by Milajerdi et al. (2021), regular participation in PA helps children improve their motor skills and control through various activities that allow them to move freely, improving their movements. This movement energizes their bodies to stay fit and healthy. On the other hand, participating in regular physical activities significantly impacts the students' overall health. Regular participation in physical activities allows the students to attain a vast range of health benefits like improved cardiovascular health, bone, muscle strength, and mood. It was demonstrated in the Blaschke et al. (2021) study that PA can significantly enhance metabolic and physical health. The phrase “health-enhancing physical activity” (HEPA), which refers to any PA that improves health without posing an excessive risk or harm, emphasizes the positive impacts of PA on health. Through this, obese students perceive that participation in physical activities leads to more opportunities to improve their health. The participant's responses support this claim are as follows:

“Physical activity, including dance, sports, and exercise, is essential for maintaining overall health and well-being. Regular participation in physical activities

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has numerous benefits, such as improving cardiovascular health, enhancing muscle strength and flexibility, boosting mood and mental well-being, and reducing the risk of chronic diseases” (P.7)

“For me, dance, sports, and exercise are awesome. Because the physical activity reduces the risk of heart disease and pressure” (P.19)

“I actively participate in various forms of physical activity to maintain a balanced lifestyle. I enjoy going for runs several times a week to stay fit and clear my mind” (P.68)

Theme 2: Obese students physical activity participation: Is it empowering or detrimental?

Physical activity participation among students, primarily obese students, is considered one of the main focuses of this study. By navigating their lived experiences, this study has formulated this theme to understand and gain a deeper understanding of PA participation, whether it is empowering or detrimental among obese students. Children and adolescents who are obese cannot be encouraged to participate in physical activity using the same methods or approaches as their counterparts who are normal weight. However, because research has indicated that these obstacles may differ from those encountered by peers of normal weight, it is necessary to pay particular attention to the obstacles that keep individuals from participating in PA (Deforche et al., 2015). Through various initiatives and careful consideration from the school administrators and the PE teachers, obese students are allowed to be part of the regular PA. This can be seen through modifications of some activities which aims to be suitable for them, connotating the same benefits and experiences they can attain with their classmates. It is essential to adapt physical activities to obese students to empower them. Simmonds et al. (2016) believe frequent physical activity (PA) is crucial for reducing obesity and enhancing children's and adolescents' physical well-being. Regular participation in PA among obese students boasts an empowering avenue for them to show their prowess and skills. Teachers can establish a welcoming and encouraging environment by customizing exercises to each

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student's requirements and skill level. This entails providing a range of low-impact activities, such as yoga, strolling, and swimming, and modifying conventional sports by modifying playing areas or utilizing lighter equipment. Additionally, prioritizing enjoyment and skill development above competitiveness creates a pleasant experience, boosts self-efficacy, and promotes sustained physical exercise. The participant's responses support this claim.

“I am looking at this as a positive note for me; therefore, I do not see any competitiveness, just having fun in general” (P.72)

“It is both challenging and empowering because it pushes me out of my comfort zone” (P.9)

“Oh, that is an interesting question! Even though I do not have a physical body to participate in activities like dance, sports, or exercise, I can imagine how engaging in these activities can be both challenging and empowering for individuals” (P.37)

On the other hand, participation in physical activities like sports, dance, and exercise is perceived by obese students as quite challenging and detrimental. This is due to various limitations, such as their physiological and psychological aspects. According to Fernandes et al. (2022), eating disorders, anxiety, disappointment, low self-esteem, negative body image, and trouble forming relationships with peers are among the psychological issues that obese youth may face. Obesity can also have negative consequences, like impaired motor skills and trouble adjusting to one's surroundings. Data also shows that obese students found it challenging to participate in physical activities due to the limitations of the physiological aspects. Students who are obese may face difficulties such as decreased cardiovascular fitness, which makes exercise more taxing. Because their joints are more stressed, they can be more vulnerable to injuries. Furthermore, having too much body fat can make it more difficult for them to control their body temperature, which raises the possibility of overheating when exercising (Thompson et al., 2020). Accordingly, from a psychological perspective, obese students typically feel shy and unable to perform some physical activities due to psychological

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constraints hindering them from achieving the health benefits of PA. In China, as studied by Chen et al. (2024), results show that among obese college students, the association between physical activity and anxiety was significantly moderated by body image. In contrast, the relationship between depression and physical activity was not moderated. Obesity hinders the confidence level of the students when participating in various physical activities. The participant's responses supported this claim.

“When I move, I am not confident because I can feel that my body fats are shaking, affecting my confidence. That is why I do not usually join extracurricular activities related to physical activities. But I can do anything if I have to do it and overcome that certain feeling about my body” (P.58)

“Playing volleyball is very challenging because I am still working on improving. On the other hand, working out at home is empowering because it makes me feel strong and helps me stay healthy” (P.20)

“It is indeed a challenge for me to do these kind of physical activities” (P.60)

Theme 3: Perceived challenges and hindrances on physical development among obese students

In participating in physical activities in physical education classes, one of the PE teacher's tasks is to make each activity suitable and inclusive for a diverse group of learners, especially those who find difficulties in participating. This theme explores the challenges faced by obese students and how these challenges hinder their physical development. Students who are obese may have major physiological obstacles when engaging in physical activity, such as decreased cardiovascular fitness, which increases fatigue and shortness of breath during exercise; joint strains, which raise the risk of musculoskeletal injuries like sprains and strains; and impaired body temperature regulation, which raises the risk of heat-related illnesses during physical exertion. In the study conducted by Baillot et al. (2021), they found that one of the main challenges perceived by obese students in participating in PA is their physical, socio-environmental,

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and psychological barriers, wherein obese students found themselves conscious in doing PA due to their physical structure which hinders them. Similarly, Hamer et al. (2021) stated that students who are obese may have several obstacles to engaging in physical activity, such as physiological constraints like decreased cardiovascular fitness, heightened susceptibility to musculoskeletal problems, and heat intolerance. Psychosocial elements such as low self-esteem, fear of being judged, and a lack of social support can also significantly influence how much they exercise. Accordingly, Beth and Vati (2021) discovered that children and adolescents in Mongolia who were overweight or obese felt unmotivated to engage in physical activities because of their physical appearance and self-confidence. The participant's responses support this theme's claim.

“One challenge I experienced in participating in physical activities is that it can be hard sometimes to stay motivated” (P.21)

“The confidence, easily get tired and I think the heavy body (it is quite hard to move if you have a large body)” (P.73)

“Societal Stigma: Negative attitudes or stereotypes about body types, age, or fitness levels can discourage people from participating in physical activities. For example, someone who feels judged for their weight might avoid gyms or sports, impacting their overall physical health and well-being.” (P.29)

“These challenges (physical and confidence) have affected my involvement in physical activities by making it harder to stay consistent.” (P.12)

“It discouraged me to continue doing the physical activities. I felt the need to avoid them to save myself from embarrassment” (P.58)

“It affects me in a way that I felt so awkward and shame whenever I am doing these physical activities with people who are physically fit and active. I sometimes lose my confidence.” (P.48)

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Conclusion

This study is leaning towards navigating the lived experiences of obese students in partaking in physical activities. In line with this, the study identified three themes from the collected data from the study participants. As found by this study, the physiological and psychological barriers hinder obese students from participating in PA, which can significantly be detrimental to their overall health and well-being. Psychological factors like poor self-confidence, self-esteem, and emotional influences were considered challenges by the study participants. On the other hand, physiological factors such as poor flexibility, low cardiovascular endurance, and muscular strength decrease the participation rate of obese students in physical activities. Based on the study's findings, it is suggested that curriculum mappers and school administrators should provide new strategies and policies that help to increase the participation of obese students in PA. Collectively, familial and societal support is also recommended for the latter. Thus, future research is needed to seek a deeper understanding of the challenges and hindrances faced by obese students.

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