

# HEALTH RELATED BEHAVIORS OF A SAMPLE OF IRAQI ADOLESCENTS <sup>+</sup>

السلوكيات المتعلقة بالصحة في عينة من الشباب المراهقين العراقيين

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## Abstract:

Adolescents may engage in risky behaviors, develop unhealthy habits, or have chronic conditions that can jeopardize their immediate and future health.

A cross-sectional study was carried out in order to describe the healthy promoting and risky behaviors of a sample of Iraqi adolescents representative in the Technical Administrative college, Baghdad, (147) students were chosen randomly during January 2011, they were subjected to previously prepared questionnaire, also anthropometric measurements of their height, weight and Body Mass Index, the statistical analysis of the students measurements showed that the higher percentage (68.7%) were with ideal BMI, only (23.6% ) were current smokers, (46.25% ) were physically inactive. The students responses regarding the dietary habits showed that the larger percentage (59.86%) having skipped meals, mainly breakfast, daily consumption of sweets (36%) and fast foods (22.44%).

The good college performance is in (31.29) of the students, (65.3%) plan for post-graduate, also low participation in scientific work (28.5% ) and (38% ) involved in outside college activities. The majority of adolescents (85%) responded to have family support, yet (41.49) are considering themselves stressful. During their free time, the larger percentage (49.65%) is using computer and internet.

The overall routine body check was not satisfactory, especially blood pressure measurement Only in 18.36% of adolescents, also regarding measurement of blood sugar in 4% of them. Recommendations was suggested to conduct more extended researches and health education to create the awareness to decrease risky health behaviors

المستخلص:

الشباب في سن المراهقة قد ينشغلون في سلوكيات خطيرة، يتكون لديهم عادات غير صحية او حالات مزمنة والتي قد تهدد حالتهم الصحية حاليا وفي المستقبل. انجزت دراسة مقطعية لغرض وصف الانماط الصحية والسلوكيات الخطرة لعينه من فئة الشباب المراهقين العراقيين المتمثلة في الكلية التقنية الادارية، ( ١٤٧ ) طالب و طالبة تم اختيارهم عشوائيا خلال شهر كانون الثاني ٢٠١١، تم عرض عليهم استمارة اسئلة معدة مسبقا وكذلك تم احتساب القياسات الجسمانية (الطول، الوزن، معدل كتلة الجسم)، اظهر التحليل الاحصائي

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لقياسات الطلبة بأنه النسبة الاعلى ٦٨,٧% لهم معدل طبيعي لكتلة الجسم، فقط (٢٣,٦%) يدخنون حاليا، (٤٦,٥%) غير نشطين فيزيائيا، كما اظهرت استجابات الطلبة بالنسبة للعادات الغذائية بانه النسبة الاكبر (٥٩,٨٦%) يختصرون بعض الوجبات الغذائية وخصوصا وجبة الفطور، تناول اليومي للحلويات بنسبة (٣٦%) وكذلك تناول الوجبات السريعة بنسبة (٢٢,٤٤%). التحصيل الدراسي كان جيدا في (٣١,٢٩%) من الطلبة، (٦٥,٣%) من الطلبة يخططون لاكمال الدراسات العليا وكذلك قلة المشاركة في البحوث العلمية (٢٨,٥%) وكذلك في نشاطات خارج الكلية بنسبة (٣٨%)، وكذلك الاغلبية من الطلبة (٨٥%) استجابوا بأن لديهم دعم عائلي ولكن (٤١,٤٩%) يصفوا أنفسهم بأنهم متوترين، ومن خلال اوقات فراغهم، النسبة الاكبر (٤٩,٦٥%) يستخدمون الحاسوب والانترنت. كانت الفحوصات الجسمانية الروتينية بصورة عامة غير مقنعة خصوصا قياس ضغط الدم في (١٨,٣٦%) منهم وكذلك قياس نسبة السكر في الدم بنسبة (٤%) فقط. تم تقديم التوصيات لانجاز بحوث اوسع والتثقيف الصحي لخلق الوعي لغرض التقليل من السلوكيات الصحية الخطرة.

### **Introduction:**

The demographic and economic transition that many developing countries are undergoing is producing important changes in health and life-style that greatly impact disease risks [1].

Adolescence is the period between puberty and completion of physical growth, roughly from 11 to 19 years. During this period, the individual undergoes extensive physical, psychological, emotional, and personality changes [2]. It is evident that healthy life style behaviors during adolescence are essential to maintain adolescent's well-being and decrease their risk of chronic diseases later in life [3], as well, adolescence is a critical period for developing positive habits and skills that create a strong foundation for healthy life style and behavior over the full life span [4].

WHO defines health promotion as "the process of enabling people to increase over and improve their life style" [5].

At individual level, health promotion can be described as the application of methods that enhance physical and emotional well-being and that's increase length and quality of life [6].

Aim of study: to describe the health promoting and risky behaviors of a sample of Iraqi adolescents in order to direct intervention on strategies to improve the health promotion activities targeted towards Iraqi adolescents.

### **Subject and Methods:-**

A cross-sectional descriptive study of a sample of Iraqi adolescents, aged 18-19 years representative in the Technical Administrative College, Baghdad. (147) students of first class mainly, were chosen randomly, during January 2011. they were invited to participate and a brief description of the study purpose was given. The participants accepted the invitation and completed a comprehensive previously prepared questionnaire, including different statements covering the personal history, health habits including dietary habits, alcohol and tobacco consumption, quality of life, and both college and outside college activities, their stress history and their routine body check. The participants were informed that their responses would be confidential, and they completed the above mentioned questionnaire either in their class rooms or in designated areas under supervision of study staff. In addition, anthropometric

measurements of weight by a balanced scale and height by placing tape straight up and down on the wall or door, Body Mass Index (BMI) is an index of weight adjusted for height, calculated by dividing weight in kilograms by height in meters, squared (  $\text{kg} / \text{m}^2$  ). The normal BMI range 18.5 – 24.9  $\text{kg}/\text{m}^2$ , and BMI below 18.5 is considered to be underweight and that of 25- 29.9 is considered to be overweight [7] . All completed questionnaire responses were analyzed by using simple descriptive statistical analysis using tests of frequencies and percentages.

## **Results:**

The total number of included adolescents was 147, distributed as 72 males and 75 females, (23.6) % of males were currently smokers, no one was actually alcoholic.

**Table (1) Distribution of the studied sample regarding their BMI.**

BMI	No. (N=147 )	%
<18.5	18	12.24
12.5-24.9	101	68.7
25-29.9	28	19.04

The results show that the higher percentage (68.7 %) of our studied sample were with ideal BMI, (19.04 %) were considered to be overweight, and only( 12.24 %) were considered to be under-weight.

**Table (2) Distribution of the studied sample regarding their physical activity.**

Dietary habits	No. (N=147 )	%
Light	47	31.97
Moderate	32	21.76
Not practicing at all	68	46.25

The results show that (46.25 %) of the adolescents were not practicing any physical activity

**Table (3) Distribution of the studied sample regarding their dietary habits.**

Dietary habits	No. (N=147 )	%
Having skipped meals	88	59.86
Diet is lacking fruits and vegetables	39	26.52
Having breakfast before going to college		
Always	29	19.72
Sometime	68	46.25
Never	50	24.01
Taking sweets and candy		
Daily takers	53	36.05
2-3 times\wk	85	57.82
Not takers	9	6.12
Taking soft drink		

Daily takers	39	26.52
2-3 times\wk	90	61.22
Not takers	18	12.24
Taking fast foods		
Daily takers	33	22.44
2-3 times\wk	64	43.35
Not takers	50	34.01

The results show that (59.86%) of adolescents having skipped meals,(26.53%) having diet lacking in fruits and vegetables ,only (19.72%) having daily breakfast, daily soft drink consumption (26.52%), daily sweats takers (36.05%) and fast food takers (22.44%).

**Table (4) Distribution of the studied sample regarding their college and outside college activities**

Activities	No. (N=147 )	%
Good college performance	46	31.29
Plan for post-graduate	96	65.3
Participation in scientific work	42	28.57
Involved in outside college	56	38.09

The results show that (31.29 %) of our studied sample have good college performances, (65.3%) plan for post-graduate study , ( 28.57 %) participate in scientific work and (38.09 %) are involved in outside college activities.

**Table (5) Distribution of the studied sample regarding their free time.**

Free time	No. (N=147 )	%
Practicing sport	28	19.04
Using computer and internet	73	49.65
Listening music	65	44.21
Reading a book	22	14.96
Others	31	21.08

The results show that during free time, the higher percentage ( 49.65 %) of adolescents are using computer and internet followed by listening music in (44.21 %) of adolescents .

**Table (6) Distribution of the studied sample regarding their stress history.**

Stress history	No. (N=147 )	%
Friend and family support	125	85
Feeling lonely	28	19.04
Involved in violet argument	21	14.28
Considering him\herself/ stressful	61	41.49

The results show that the majority (85 %) of our included sample have friend and family support, (41.49 %) are considered to be stressful.

**Table (7) Distribution of the studied sample regarding their body routine check.**

Routine check	No. (N=147 )	%
Undergo complete physical Ex per/year	74	50.34
Teeth check per year	88	59.86
Checking B. p	27	18.36
Checking B.sugar	6	4.08

The results show that the proportion of adolescents who undergo at least yearly complete physical exam (50.34%), teeth check (59.86 %), and very low proportion (18.36 %), (4.08 %) in those routinely check their blood pressure and blood sugar respectively.

### **Discussion:**

The health of young people is critically linked to the health related behaviors they choose to adopt, adolescents may not think of the long term consequences of their health practices [8].

The current data indicated that 19% of the involved adolescents, were overweight, in comparison (7 – 9 %) of Iranian college adolescent students were above the normal body weight [9], and although smoking remains a major threat to the health of adolescents [10], yet (23.6%) of our studied male were current smokers.

Despite the recommendations for a healthier diet [11] .Our data showed several nutrition and diet risks, breakfast seems to be most frequent missed meal of the day, breakfast skipping can lead to overeating during the day [12]. A Canadian study [13] has documented the breakfast eating habits of adolescents in Ontario , about (15%) of that population didn't consume daily breakfast, also the frequent consumption of commercially prepared or take away food rich in fat, sugar or salts. In the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, recent studies revealed consumption of animal products and refined foods in the diet at the expense of vegetables and fruits [14], also it seems that frequent consumption of sweets , candy and soft drinks as they are our adolescents favorite, actually they add no nutrients to the diet and only adds calories and not much else [15].

Regular physical exercise is another health habit which is lacking in our studied sample, similar to the results of a survey conducted in Jordan [16], 83% of students have insufficient physical activity.

College life can be over whelming and stressful to our included sample, having too much to do and have no enough time , the way a student choose to spend his or her free time leaves a very powerful impression to college methods [17]. As our sample experienced in time management in leisure pursuits, also activities outside of college are also the best way to show a student's personal self [18].

The overall routine body check of our studied sample was disappointing. Evidence shows that periodontal disease may increase during adolescence due to lack of motivation to practice oral hygiene [19].

Also having a yearly blood pressure test will provide health care professionals with a base line level to compare during subsequent visits [20].

A total of 20,047 examinations by 12 different groups of investigators were abstracted and elevated blood pressure was found in 0.1% to 1.6 of adolescents [21].

The majority of our studied sample plan for post-graduate in spite of having low college performances. Lewis J[22] attributed that some students will probably have developed a real interest in particular topic during their studies and to take the chance to post-graduate, this finding is compatible to (16) regarding Jordian adolescents who planned to pursue higher education.

### **Conclusion:**

1) Many health promoting or damaging habits are established during the adolescent's years.

2) Larger percentage of included adolescents are with ideal Body Mass Index.

3) The current health related behaviors of our studied adolescents showed several specific unhealthy related risks including insufficient physical activity, having skipped meals especially breakfast, and frequent candy or soft drink consumption and taking fast foods. 4)

Low overall college performance, participation in scientific work also regarding the involvement of outside college activities but the majority plan for post-graduate study.

5) The majority of adolescents have family and friends support but considerable percentage of them considered to be stressful and they experienced in different leisure pursuits mainly using computer, listening music and others.

6) The overall routine body check were disappointing especially regarding blood pressure, and blood sugar.

### **Recommendation:**

1) The need for additional advanced researches with larger groups to obtain more effective and reliable outcomes.

2) The need for strategies and coordinated efforts at all levels (family, university, community and government) to create awareness to reduce the risk health behaviors through health education.

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