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DIETARY BEHAVIORS, PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND SEDENTARY BEHAVIORS AMONG ADOLESCENTS FROM ARAB NATIONS

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This research examines the epidemiology of health risk behaviors among adolescents from Arab regions. We synthesize evidence from existing literature on dietary behaviors, physical activity and sedentary behaviors. Adolescence is a period that describes the transition from childhood to young adulthood. It is an opportune time for the emergence and prevention of new behaviors, and is critical in shaping future health conditions. A large proportion of the population in Arab nations consists of youth, with about 20% of the population aged 10 to 19 years. This presents a demographic opportunity to promote health and reduce disease burdens. Public health concerns related to dietary behaviours among adolescents from Arab nations vary from high rates of eating disorders, documented evidence of high prevalence of overweight and obesity, eating attitudes that promote extreme dieting or binge eating, and evidence of vitamin D deficiencies. For instance, the prevalence of binge eating has been documented in Saudi Arabia (69.9%), Jordan (16.9%), the UAE (32%), Oman (15%), Egypt (over 75% report at least one episode, and Lebanon (4.2%). Obesity rates range between 12 and 36%. In some nations, these dietary behaviours and health outcomes exhibited gender differences. These lend their way to issues related to body image and dissatisfaction, which low levels of physical activity and high rates of sedentary lifestyles further magnified. For example, a UAE-based study reports that the prevalence of sedentary behavior amongst adolescents is as high as 40%. These numbers are comparable to data from Morocco and Saudi Arabia. This research provides evidence in support of the need for more research and action; while research provides evidence on dietary behaviours, physical activity, and sedentary behaviours among adolescents from Arab nations, more action-based research that addresses these health risk behaviours is a requisite in dealing with and tackling these public health concerns.

BIOGRAPHY

Caroline Barakat-Haddad has completed her PhD from McMaster University, Canada. She started her academic career as an Assistant Professor in Environmental Health at Zayed University, Dubai. She held positions at the University of Toronto Scarborough as an Assistant Professor in Health Studies, and Discipline Representative. She is currently an Associate Professor in Environmental and Occupational Health at the University Of Ontario Institute Of Technology, Canada. Dr Barakat-Haddad has more than 30 publications in reputed academic sources and has presented her research at over 45 national and international venues. She has been cited over 100 times. She serves on an editorial board, is a peer reviewer for a National Research Fund and is the outgoing Chair of the Geography of Health and Healthcare Study Group of the Canadian Association of Geographers.

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