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Lifestyle and food habits of school-based children during the COVID-19 pandemic era: A cross-sectional study among a South Indian urban population

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: The present study was carried out to understand the lifestyle changes such as physical activity, diet and sleep pattern among children 8 to 15 years of age during this extended period of stay indoors as a result of the SARS COV-2 pandemic and also to examine the effect of lifestyle changes, if any on the nutritional status of the children.

Methods: This was a cross-sectional study conducted among school-going children in pre- and early adolescence (8 to 15 years). Survey conducted among parents of children in the study age group to understand the lifestyle changes like family cooking practices, food preference of the child, physical activity, screen time and sleep pattern. Data were entered and analyzed using SPSS version24.

Results: The total numbers of study participants were 330. Around 33% of the parents of our study participants resorted to preparing healthy food during the pandemic. Around 70% of the study participants had access to outdoor games. More than 50% of the study participants were involved in recreational screen time for > two hours. Weight gain of more than 3kg during the ten-month period was significantly associated with overweight/obesity and age (8-12 years) and increased screen time was associated with overweight/obesity among girls.

Conclusion: Positive and negative changes in lifestyle were observed among our study participants and their households. Providing clear guidelines and proper health education by the state and the schools may be important to prevent adverse health outcomes in children during their prolonged stay indoors due to the pandemic.

Key word: COVID-19 pandemic, lifestyle changes, children, adolescents

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