

# Gender Differences in Body Mass Index, Body Weight Perception and Weight Loss Strategies among Undergraduates in Universiti Malaysia Sarawak

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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** This study was carried out among undergraduate students in Universiti Malaysia Sarawak with the objective of examining gender differences in body mass index (BMI), body weight perception, eating attitudes and weight-loss strategies. **Methods:** Subjects consisted of 600 undergraduates (300 males and 300 females) recruited from the various faculties between September 2008 until mid-November 2008. The Original Figure Rating Scale: Body Weight Perception, Body Shape Questionnaire (BSQ) and Eating Attitudes Test-26 (EAT-26) were used as assessment tools. **Results:** Overall, 52.8% of students had normal BMI, with approximately an equal number of both sexes. More males than females were overweight (33.7%), while more females were underweight (25.3%). Males were more likely to perceive themselves as overweight, and fail to see themselves as underweight. More than half of the females preferred their ideal figure to be underweight, whereas about 30% males chose an overweight figure as their ideal model. Females were generally more concerned about body weight, body shape and eating than males. They diet more frequently, had self-induced vomiting, and used laxatives and exercise as their weight-loss strategies. **Conclusion:** Issues pertaining to body weight perception, eating attitudes and weight-loss strategies exist with differences among male and female undergraduates. Thus, in order to correct misperceptions among young adults, a more tailored intervention programme and more in-depth studies into the various factors involved are required.

**Keywords:** BMI, body weight perception, eating attitudes, gender differences, weight loss strategies

## INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is in a state of a lifestyle transition between traditional and sedentary, with increasing amounts of consumption of fat and calories. Teenagers who are in the period of change and growth in the physical, mental and social aspects may be

predisposed to be overweight and obese along with other factors such as genetics, daily routine, metabolics and environmental factors (Pon *et al.*, 2004).

The prevalence of obesity in Malaysia is increasing. The prevalence of obesity in adults 18 years and above as reported in the Second National Health and Morbidity

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