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Markers of the Nutrition Transition among Moroccan Students: The Case of the Beni Mellal-Khenifra Region

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Context: Like other emerging countries, Morocco is still facing persistent nutritional problems but also other emerging problems related to globalization, urbanization and changes in lifestyles and diet.

Objectives, subjects and methods: The objective of this research carried out by the Laboratory of Biological Engineering of the Faculty of Sciences and Techniques of Beni Mellal is to investigate how the nutritional transition affects the nutritional status of students by focusing on gender, social gradient and lifestyle. The study was based on a descriptive, cross-sectional, etiologic survey of a population of students from Sultan Moulay Slimane University. The data were collected by individual interview on the basis of a questionnaire. Statistical data were entered and processed using the SPSS version 10 Software. The sample included 250 university students (54.4% girls and 45.6% boys) aged 20 to 24 years selected by simple random sampling in the year 2015. The recruitment of students took place after obtaining their consent. Assessment of the nutritional status of students is based on the Body Mass Index (BMI).

Results: Among the students surveyed, 72% had "normal" BMI values and 28% had a nutritional problem related to underweight, overweight or obesity. By comparing the two sexes, the prevalence of nutritional problems (underweight, overweight and obesity) is higher among girls (33% vs 23%). The results show that the prevalence of overweight among all students is 8.1%, and that obesity is present among 3.3% of them. Excess weight (overweight and obesity) was higher in girls (14.4%) than in boys (7.9%).

To highlight the factors behind this observed nutritional situation, we analyzed dissatisfaction with body image as well as the food strategy adopted according to the student's gender. Body satisfaction was assessed using Stunkard's Established Figures. The food strategy adopted consists of follow-up or not in the last 12 months preceding the survey of a diet. The results of this survey show that 41.3% of respondents are dissatisfied with their body weight: 16.8% and 27.6% respectively want a lower weight body or higher than their actual body weight.

Conclusion: At the end of this analysis, it has been shown that the changes in eating habits and lifestyles that Morocco is currently experiencing have contributed mostly to the emergence of excess weight, especially among young people. Given this situation, the establishment of a preventive strategy based on regular monitoring of body status, nutrition education and the promotion of physical activity in the university environment is strongly recommended.