For Immediate Release

New icddr,b study reveals that 14 out of every 100 children living in an urban area in Bangladesh are overweight

03 July 2013, Dhaka: Preliminary findings of a nationwide study undertaken by icddr,b on childhood obesity in urban areas of Bangladesh reveal that 10% of children aged 5-18 years old are overweight, while 4% are obese. The findings of the study titled *Obesity prevalence and patterns of diet and physical activity among children and adolescents in urban areas in Bangladesh* were discussed at a dissemination seminar in icddr,b’s Sasakawa Auditorium on Wednesday, 3 July 2013.

The study was conducted in seven cities across Bangladesh by icddr,b’s Centre for Control of Chronic Diseases, with support from the National Nutrition Services of Institute of Public Health Nutrition under the Directorate General of Health Services of Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in Bangladesh. The objective of the study was to estimate the prevalence of obesity in children 5-18 years of age in urban areas in Bangladesh, as well as their patterns of diet and physical activity. Around 4,100 children living in 30 wards of each of the seven city corporation areas participated in the study. Body mass index (BMI) was calculated using the age and sex specific BMI values set by the International Obesity Task Force to estimate overweight and obesity among children.

The study indicates that there is a double burden of both under-nutrition (30%) and over-nutrition (14%). A sharp decrease in the prevalence of underweight was observed with increase in age among the study children, but a slow rise in overweight and obesity was observed with increase in age. Evidence of over nutrition and obesity among children in all seven divisions, coupled with unhealthy food habit and lack of physical activity indicate the emergence of obesity as a public health problem among children 5-18 years of age in urban areas in Bangladesh. Further assessment of obesity in preschool children (below five years) and in rural areas, and identifying risk factors of obesity in children will be necessary for developing strategies for the control of childhood obesity in Bangladesh.

**Study highlights:**

1. Fifty six percent of children 5-18 years of age covered in the study had a normal weight.
2. The study also showed that 30% had a weight lower than the normal weight (under nutrition).
3. Fourteen percent of the children surveyed had a weight heavier than the normal range of the age-sex specific BMI cut off; 4% children were obese
4. The preliminary assessment of the dietary pattern suggested that 98% children consumed rice or bread at least 4 times a week, but consumption of other types of food was less frequently consumed by children for more than 3 times in a week; such as, meat (24%), egg (60%), legume (71%), vegetables (61%), milk (56%) and fruits (22%) consumed fruits at . The study also reported that more than half of the study children had frequently taken a local snack that required deep frying (, at least 3 to 4 times a week), such as, *shingara, samusa, chop, beguni,*
peaju, etc. However, consumption of a fast food in an average week was reported in about 20% children, such as pizza, burger, fried chicken etc.

5. The preliminary assessment of the physical activity pattern revealed that the study children generally were not involved in rigorous physical activity on an average day or in a week. About 70% children had access to a playground either in the community or in the school, but only 45% children went to a playground. More than 94% children were attending an academic institution at the time of survey, but only 62% of them attended a physical activity class.

Mr. Md Shafiqul Islam Laskar, Additional Secretary (Public Health and WHO), Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (MoHFW), Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh was the chief guest at the seminar along with special guests: Professor Dr. Khandakar Md Shefayet Ullah, Director General, Directorate General of Health Services (MoHFW), Professor Dr. M Iqbal Arsenal, General Secretary, Bangladesh Medical Association, Professor Dr Md Suhrab Ali, Member, Board of Trustees, icddr,b and Professor Dr. Md Ekhlasur Rahman, Director, Institute of Public Health Nutrition. National Professor Brig (Retd) Abdul Malik, Eminent Cardiologist and Secretary General, National Heart Foundation and Research Hospital, Bangladesh, chaired the event while John D Clemens, MD, Executive Director of iccdr,b gave the welcome speech.

Professor Louis Wilhelmus Niessen, Director, Centre for Control of Chronic Diseases, iccdr,b, and Principal Investigator of the Childhood Obesity Study gave the introductory remarks, while the presentation on the study findings were made by co-principal investigators Dr Aliya Naheed, Associate Scientist, Team Leader of the Childhood Obesity Study and Nazratun Nayeem Monalisa, Dissemination Manager.

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Note to the Editor

Childhood obesity is one of the most serious public health challenges of the 21st century. The problem is global and is steadily affecting many low- and middle-income countries, particularly in urban settings. When children eat more than they need, their bodies store the extra calories in fat cells to use for energy later. If this pattern continues over time, and their bodies do not need this stored energy, they develop more fat cells and may develop obesity.

Despite the rising trend, there is no available report on the burden of obesity in children in Bangladesh, particularly for school aged children. Various adult health problems particularly chronic disease may be attributable to childhood obesity, such as, heart disease, diabetes, stroke, cancer, osteoarthritis, liver and gallbladder disease, sleep apnea and respiratory problems, etc. Urbanisation is highly associated with several dietary and behavioral risk factors for both of chronic disease and obesity. Availability of more high calorie food via fast-food chains, better transportation facilities, less outdoor recreational space, intake of more food and beverages as result of attractive mass media campaign, and more sedentary jobs (such as desk jobs) as opposed to more active jobs (such as outdoor games) are some of the important factors for increasing obesity and overweight in children in urban area, particularly in school age.