

HEALTHCARE RESOURCE UTILIZATION AMONG PEDIATRIC POPULATIONS BY WEIGHT STATUS

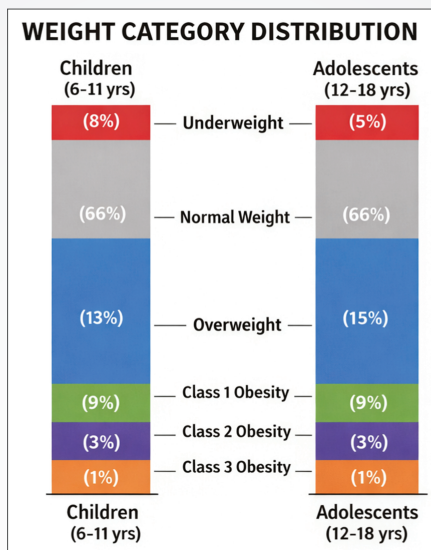
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Background

Prevalence rates of childhood and adolescent obesity have risen significantly in recent decades. The association between abnormal weight status in young adulthood and healthcare resource utilization (HRU) is not well established. This study investigates the relationship between weight status and HRU among a large pediatric population.

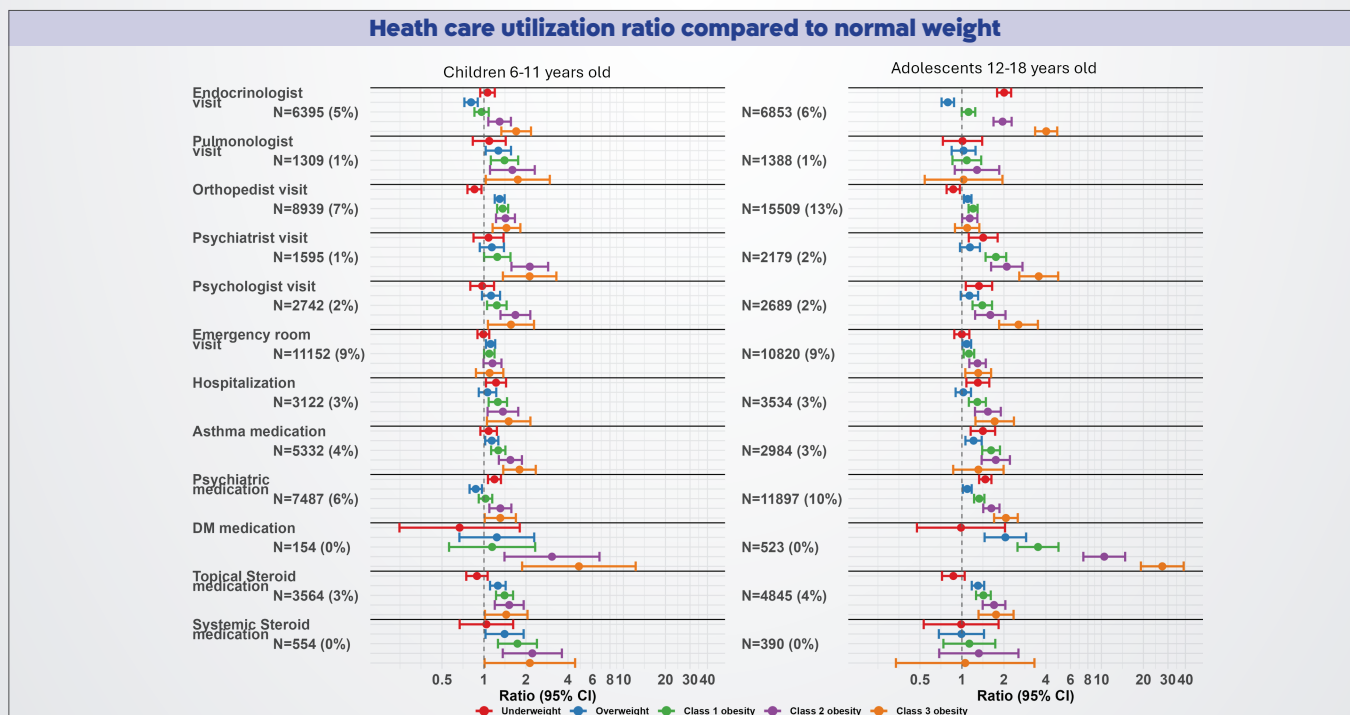
Methods

A cross-sectional study including all Meuhedet Health Services (MHS) members born between 2006 and 2018. BMI measurements between 2022-2024 were extracted from electronic medical records, and members were classified into weight categories using the US-CDC guidelines. Annual HRU across weight category was compared to the normal BMI category using multivariate logistic regression adjusted for socioeconomic status and sector.



Results

BMI measurements were recorded for 238,304 members aged 6-18 years (49% adolescents aged 12-18, 48% females). In both age groups, as the severity of obesity increased from Class 1 to Class 3, there was a concomitant rise in the demand for healthcare services, including specialist visits, ER visits, and hospitalizations. Children (ages 6-11) with Class 3 obesity were 1.5 (95% CI 1.1-2.2) times more likely to be hospitalized compared to normal-weight peers. Adolescents (ages 12-18 years) exhibited steeper utilization trends compared to younger children, particularly regarding mental health. Adolescents with Class 3 obesity were over twice as likely to use psychiatric medications compared to their normal-weight peers.



Conclusion

- **Immediate healthcare burden:** The burden of pediatric obesity is already evident in elementary school and represents a significant clinical impact during childhood and adolescents rather than just a future risk.
- **Systemic strain:** The graded increase in obesity severity creates a substantial strain on the healthcare system across emergency, inpatient and pharmacologic domains.
- **Urgency for integrated care:** Comprehensive interventions addressing both metabolic and psychosocial health are urgently needed to mitigate this burden