

Prevalence and pattern of dyslipidaemia among Nigerian adolescents living in Benin City: A school-based cross-sectional study

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Abstract

Background: The increasing prevalence of overweight and obesity in the paediatric population can be associated with an increased rate of dyslipidaemia, a modifiable metabolic risk factor for developing cardiovascular disease.

Objectives: To estimate the prevalence and describe the pattern of dyslipidaemia among overweight/obese and normal-weight students aged 10 to 16 years, living in Benin City, Nigeria.

Method: In this case-control study, a total of 98 students comprising 49 subjects with high BMI ($\geq 85^{\text{th}}$ percentile) and 49 controls with normal BMI (5^{th} to $<85^{\text{th}}$ percentile), matched for age and gender and from similar socio-economic and ethnic background were investigated. The first public school in a list of alphabetically arranged secondary schools was selected. Thereafter, the students were randomly selected. Serum concentrations of total cholesterol, high-density lipoprotein-cholesterol (HDL-C), triglycerides and low-density lipoprotein-cholesterol were determined, using an automated analyzer with commercially available kits.

Results: Of the 98 students who were investigated, there was at least one "abnormal" lipid concentration in 31 (63.3%; 95% Confidence interval (CI) = 49.8-76.8) adolescents with overweight/obese and the corresponding prevalence of 51% (95% CI = 43.9-58.1) in adolescents with normal BMI; p-value >0.05 . Among overweight/obese participants, the prevalence of dyslipidaemia was significantly

higher in girls than boys ($p < 0.05$). The frequency of borderline-low HDL-C in overweight/obese and normal-BMI participants was 18.4% and 16.3%, respectively. In both overweight/obese and normal-BMI participants, the most common type of dyslipidaemia was low HDL-C with a prevalence of 62.3% (95% CI= 55.6-69.2) and 51.0% (95% CI=43.9-58.1) in overweight/obese and normal-BMI participants, respectively ($p > 0.05$).

Conclusions: A high proportion of adolescents with either overweight/obesity or normal BMI had dyslipidaemia with the former having a higher proportion. Low HDL-C level was the most common abnormality in dyslipidaemia.

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(Key words: Adolescents, dyslipidaemia, overweight, obesity, Nigeria, students)

Introduction

Dyslipidaemia refers to abnormal concentrations of lipids and/or lipoproteins in the blood and may result from defects in the production, transport and/or degradation of lipoproteins¹. It may be classified as primary or secondary to other diseases, such as HIV infection, insulin resistance or chronic kidney disease¹. The reported prevalence of dyslipidaemia in adolescence ranges from 19.7 to 34.3%, depending on the lifestyle and the cut-off values applied in the definition³⁻⁵. Two separate school-based studies, one in India and the other in Brazil, reported dyslipidaemia prevalence rates as high as 62.3% and 66.7%, respectively^{6,7}. The results of several studies indicate that the prevalence of dyslipidaemia in adolescence is increasing in parallel with the dramatic rise in prevalence of adolescent obesity in various countries⁸⁻¹⁰. Some recent studies involving children and adolescents revealed that high body mass index (BMI) is closely associated with dyslipidaemia^{11,12}. Dyslipidaemia is a modifiable, metabolic risk factor for development of cardiovascular disease (CVD)¹ and insulin resistance². It is estimated that 40-55% of children with dyslipidaemia will have hyperlipidaemia during adulthood¹³. Elevated levels of serum triglyceride and low-density lipoprotein cholesterol (LDL-C) are linked metabolically and this combination, known as "atherogenic dyslipidaemia", is a strong risk factor for CVD^{14,15}.

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Increasing triglyceride (TG) levels causes profound changes in both the physical and chemical composition of high-density lipoprotein cholesterol (HDL-C), very low-density lipoprotein (VLDL) and LDL-C particles¹⁶. The particle core represented by cholesterol esters in HDL-C, is progressively depleted and replaced by TG¹⁶.

VLDL is produced in the liver and is typically composed of Apo B 100, Apo E, and Apo CI, Apo C II, and Apo C III¹⁷. It is the major transporter of endogenously newly synthesized triglyceride from the liver to the cells. The plasma concentration of triglyceride is dependent on the circulating VLDL level. Hypertriglyceridaemia develops either when VLDL production is increased or its clearance is impaired. There is no easy way to measure VLDL but it is usually estimated from the individual's plasma TG level. It has been suggested that dysfunctional VLDL synthesis and release is a key factor in progression to nonalcoholic steatohepatitis¹⁸. Increased secretion of VLDL leads to increase in small density LDL production and decrease in HDL, substantially influencing the development of atherosclerosis¹⁹.

In African countries, including Nigeria, epidemiological data regarding the prevalence and pattern of dyslipidaemia in the paediatric age group are very scarce. The same is true of the prevalence of elevated serum levels of VLDL-C.

Objectives

The present study aimed at estimating the prevalence and describing the pattern of dyslipidaemia among overweight/obese and normal-weight students aged 10 to 16 years, living in Benin City, Nigeria.

Method

This was a case-control school-based cross-sectional study involving an urban secondary school in Egor Local Government Area (LGA) of Edo State, Nigeria. The majority of the parents of the students are traders or civil servants. The study was conducted over a one-month period, 1st to 30th June, 2016.

Study group and sampling technique: In this study, the first public secondary school in a list of alphabetically arranged secondary schools in Egor LGA was selected. Thereafter, the students were randomly selected from among all students aged 10 to 16 years. Each of the selected students was given a written note explaining the nature of the study as well as a questionnaire to be completed by their parents/caregivers. The study involved a total of 98 students (49 subjects and 49 controls). The subjects (high BMI, $\geq 85^{\text{th}}$ percentile) and controls (normal-BMI, 5^{th} to $< 85^{\text{th}}$ percentile) were matched for age

and gender. The socio-economic status and ethnicity of the subjects and controls were similar as the school is a public school where there is no discrimination. The students attending the school were from various Nigerian social strata and ethnicity. Excluded from the study were students with a positive history or obvious clinical evidence of hypothyroidism, liver disease, chronic kidney disease, Cushing syndrome, diabetes mellitus or who were on drugs such as corticosteroids or oral contraceptives.

Anthropometric measurements: Following a standard procedure²⁰, the height was measured to the nearest 0.1cm, using a Holtian portable anthropometer and the weight was measured to the nearest 0.1kg, using a Seca Scale Balance with the subject in light clothing and barefoot. If a duplicate measurement differed by $>0.5\text{cm}$ or $>0.5\text{kg}$ respectively, a third measurement was performed and the average of the two closest measurements was recorded as the final value. To eliminate inter-observer error, all anthropometric measurements were done by one of the authors. The BMI of each of the subjects was computed, using the standard formula²⁰. The blood pressure of the participants was measured by one of the authors and steps were taken to minimize errors.

Blood sample collection and serum lipid profile analysis: The details of the intended procedure was explained to each of the participants before collection of blood sample. Prior to sampling, the participants maintained their usual dietary pattern within the past 3 days preceding the study. Following an overnight fast (at least 12-hour fast), a venous puncture in the antecubital fossa was performed and 5ml of blood was collected into an appropriate sample container without anticoagulant and stored at 8°C . After one hour, all samples were centrifuged at 3000rpm for 15 minutes and the serum aliquots were stored at -20°C until assayed. The serum concentrations of total cholesterol (TC), HDL-C, TG and LDL-C were determined, using an automated analyzer with commercially available kits and following strictly the manufacturer's instructions throughout the assay procedures.

Definitions: In the present study, cutoff points recommended by the National Heart Lung Blood Institute (NHLBI) Expert Panel on Integrated Guidelines for Cardiovascular Health Risk Reduction in Children and Adolescents were used in defining dyslipidaemia²². In addition, the presence of any one of the following four criteria: high serum LDL-C, TG, TC or low HDL-C concentrations was considered as dyslipidaemia⁹. Hyperlipidaemia was defined by the presence of high serum TC or TG concentrations. VLDL-C was estimated by dividing the plasma triglyceride by

five, reflecting the ratio of cholesterol to triglyceride in VLDL particles²¹. Based on NHLBI criteria, elevated or low serum lipid values were categorized into borderline and abnormal as follows: (i) Borderline: LDL-C ≥ 100 mg/dl, HDL-C < 45 mg/dl, TG > 130 mg/dl, TC ≥ 170 mg/dl and VLDL-C 18-26mg/dl. (ii) Abnormal: LDL-C ≥ 130 mg/dl, HDL-C < 35 mg/dl, TG > 130 mg/dl, TC ≥ 200 mg/dl and VLDL-C > 26 mg/dl. Normal weight, overweight and obesity were defined by BMI between 5th to $< 85^{\text{th}}$, 85th to $< 95^{\text{th}}$ and $\geq 95^{\text{th}}$ centiles, respectively.

Ethical issues: Ethical clearance certificate was obtained from Research and Ethics Committee of the College of Medical Sciences, University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria (No. CMS/REC/2016/001). The administrative head of the school and the Ministry of Education gave permission for the conduct of the study. Written informed consent was obtained from the parents/caregivers of each of the study subjects. We obtained verbal assent from each of the participants and emphasized to them that their participation was entirely voluntary.

Statistical analysis: Data were entered into an Excel spread sheet after double checking their accuracy and analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0. Mean and standard deviation were used for quantitative data. Confidence intervals, frequency distributions and percentages were calculated. Differences between means were tested with t-test and prevalence was tested using Z-test. Significant p-values were set at < 0.05 .

Results

There was a total of 98 students, comprising 49 overweight/obese subjects and 49 normal-BMI controls, matched for age and gender. There were 29 girls and 20 boys in each group. The mean age of the participants was 12.9 ± 1.2 years and ranged from 10-16 years. The socio-economic status and ethnicity of the subjects and controls were similar as the school was a public school where there is no discrimination. The anthropometric characteristics of the participants are seen in Table 1. The mean BMI and waist circumference were both significantly higher in subjects than controls, irrespective of gender.

Table 1: Anthropometry of the subjects and controls according to gender

Characteristic	Subjects Male	Controls Male	t-statistic (p-value)	Subjects Female	Controls Female	t-statistic (p-value)
Mean weight (kg)	52.3 \pm 6.4	39.1 \pm 7.8	9.158 (< 0.001)	40.6 \pm 5.2	36.3 \pm 8.4	3.047 (< 0.01)
Mean height (cm)	149.3 \pm 6.8	142.4 \pm 6.6	5.097 (< 0.01)	146.8 \pm 7.3	140.3 \pm 5.6	4.945 (< 0.01)
Mean BMI (kg/m ²)	27.32 \pm 7.2	16.8 \pm 2.15	9.800 (< 0.001)	28.7 \pm 3.3	17.5 \pm 3.50	16.30 (< 0.001)
Mean WC (cm)	83.2 \pm 4.9	68.8 \pm 4.1	15.77 (< 0.001)	88.9 \pm 5.2	69.1 \pm 6.7	16.342 (< 0.001)
Mean HC (cm)	90.3 \pm 10.6	70.8 \pm 8.8	9.908 (< 0.001)	102.3 \pm 8.7	72.5 \pm 8.6	17.052 (< 0.001)
Mean WC/HC ratio	0.90 \pm 0.08	0.85 \pm 0.05	3.710 (< 0.001)	0.86 \pm 0.05	0.80 \pm 0.06	5.378 (< 0.001)
Mean SBP (mmHg)	107.3 \pm 10.2	103.5 \pm 9.9	1.871 (> 0.05)	105.0 \pm 9.4	101.5 \pm 9.3	1.853 (> 0.05)
Mean DBP (mmHg)	70.0 \pm 6.7	63.6 \pm 8.8	4.051 (< 0.001)	65.7 \pm 9.1	62.1 \pm 9.6	1.905 (> 0.05)

BMI: Body mass index, WC: Waist circumference, HC: Hip circumference, SBP: Systolic blood pressure DBP: Diastolic blood pressure

Of the 98 participants, 56 (57.1%) had at least one abnormal serum lipid concentration (dyslipidaemia). There was at least one "abnormal" lipid concentration in 31 [63.3%; 95% confidence interval (CI) = 49.8-76.8] overweight/obese adolescents with a corresponding prevalence of 51.0%; 95% CI = 43.9-58.1) in normal-weight adolescents; Z-test statistic = 1.085 p-value > 0.05 . Among overweight/obese participants, 21 (42.9%; 95% CI= 35.8-50.0) girls and 10 (20.4%; 95% CI=

14.6-26.2) boys had dyslipidaemia; Z-test statistic = 2.468, p-value < 0.05 . For normal-weight participants, 15 (30.6%; 95% CI= 24.0-37.2) girls and 10 (20.4%; 95% CI=14.6-26.2) boys; Z-test statistic = 1.166, p-value > 0.05 .

Table 2 shows the prevalence rates of "borderline" and "abnormal" lipid and lipoprotein concentrations in subjects and controls.

Table 2: Prevalence of acceptable, borderline and abnormal lipid concentrations in subjects and controls

Parameter	Subjects (n=49) n (%)	Controls (n=49) n (%)	Z-test (p-value)
<i>High-density-lipoprotein cholesterol (mg/dl)</i>			
Acceptable (>45)	10 (20.4)	16 (32.7)	1.392 (>0.05)
Borderline (40-45)	09 (18.4)	08 (16.3)	0.039 (<0.05)
Abnormal (<40)	30 (61.2)	25 (51.0)	0.146 (>0.05)
<i>Total cholesterol (mg/dl)</i>			
Acceptable (<170)	46 (93.9)	48 (97.9)	1.032 (>0.05)
Borderline (170-199)	03 (06.1)	01 (02.1)	1.004 (>0.05)
Abnormal (\geq 200)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	
<i>Low-density-lipoprotein cholesterol (mg/dl)</i>			
Acceptable (<110)	42 (85.7)	46 (93.9)	1.353 (>0.05)
Borderline (110-129)	06 (12.2)	03 (06.1)	1.053 (>0.05)
Abnormal (\geq 130)	01 (02.1)	0 (0.0)	0.145 (>0.05)
<i>Triglyceride (mg/dl)</i>			
Acceptable (<90)	40 (81.6)	44 (89.8)	1.167 (>0.05)
Borderline (90-129)	09 (18.4)	05 (10.2)	1.167 (>0.05)
Abnormal (\geq 130)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	
<i>Very-low-density-lipoprotein cholesterol mg/dl</i>			
Acceptable (<18)	41 (83.7)	43 (87.8)	0.412 (>0.05)
Borderline (18-26)	08 (16.3)	06 (12.2)	0.582 (>0.05)
Abnormal (>26)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	

In both overweight/obese and normal-weight participants, the most common type of dyslipidaemia was low HDL-C with a prevalence of 62.3% (95% CI= 55.6-69.2) in overweight/obese participants and 51.0% (95% CI=43.9-58.1) in normal-weight participants; Z-test statistic = 1.136, p-value >0.05. One (2.0%) of the 49 overweight/obese participants had a combined (atherogenic) dyslipidaemia but none among their normal BMI counterparts. The only participant with combined dyslipidaemia was an 11-year-old girl with waist circumference 96.5cm (>97th percentile), hip circumference of 101.6cm (>97th percentile), giving a waist/hip circumference ratio of 0.95. Her BMI was 26kg/m² (>95th percentile). She had a low HDL-C (31.2mg/dl) and an elevated LDL-C (141.4mg/dl). The mean serum VLDL-C was 15.5 \pm 6.6mg/dl, 95% CI=13.7-17.3, (range 7.8-24.1mg/dl) and 13.4 \pm 6.4mg/dl, 95% CI=11.6-15.2, (range 6.0-21.4mg/dl) in overweight/obese and normal BMI participants, respectively; t-statistic = 1.313, p > 0.05.

Discussion

We observed a high dyslipidaemia prevalence in both overweight/obese (63.3%) and normal BMI (51.0%) children and adolescents, suggesting that dyslipidaemia is a common health problem among the study population. Recently, two separate studies involving children and adolescents in Brazil reported comparable prevalence rates of 62.1% and 63.8%, respectively^{23,24}. On the other hand, our prevalence rate was lower than the 75.6% found in India⁶ but higher than 34.2%, 48.8%, 42.9% and

45.8% reported from Iran, Mexico, Turkey and Germany, respectively^{5,28-27}. Such country-to-country variations in prevalence rates may be explained by differences in diet, eating behaviour, physical activity and genetic make-up. In addition, the cut-off values applied in the definition of dyslipidaemia and the method of serum lipid measurements may be contributory. Although in our study, the prevalence of dyslipidaemia was higher in overweight/obese than in normal BMI participants, the difference was not statistically significant. Previous studies have shown a similar trend^{8,11,12}. The high prevalence of dyslipidaemia observed in this study is worrisome, considering that a previous study reported a high prevalence of clustering of CVD risk factors among adolescents in a rural southwestern part of Nigeria²⁸. In that study, 72% of the adolescents showed clustering of two to four CVD risk factors. The present study did not investigate clustering of CVD risk factors.

Data from the present study revealed that a significantly higher proportion of overweight/obese girls than boys had dyslipidaemia. Similarly, the frequency of dyslipidaemia was higher in girls than boys in the normal BMI adolescents, suggesting that gender plays an important role in the epidemiology of dyslipidaemia. Other researchers have reported similar findings^{8,23,24}. In contrast, an Iranian study showed that dyslipidaemia was more frequent in boys than girls⁵. Alternatively, there are reports of studies in India and Mexico indicating that there is no significant gender difference in the prevalence of dyslipidaemia^{6,25}. Although females

tend to have higher serum lipid levels, they ultimately have lower CVD risk than males in adulthood²⁹.

With regard to the pattern of dyslipidaemia, low serum HDL-C concentration was the most prevalent dyslipidaemia observed in the present study. This is in keeping with the observation among adolescents in Ghana³⁰, Iran⁵, India⁶ and Brazil²³ but inconsistent with the observation that hypertriglyceridaemia was the most prevalent dyslipidaemia among adolescents in China⁹ and Turkey²⁶. In Germany, elevated total cholesterol was the most frequent pattern of dyslipidaemia²⁷. These variations in pattern of dyslipidaemia may be attributed to differences in diet and its interaction with the genes of individual adolescents in the various countries. This view is supported by reports of studies on nutrigenetics and nutrigenomics that have revealed interaction between diet, genes, and pattern of dyslipidaemia^{31,32}. Within this context, the results of a study by Mahley RW, *et al*³³ revealed that consumption of a higher percentage of carbohydrate than the recommended macronutrient range is associated with low HDL-C levels. In Nigeria, a greater proportion of our diet is made up of carbohydrate with the potential of exceeding the recommended macronutrient range. Borderline serum lipid levels were common in our study population. In this regard, nearly one-fifth of our participants had borderline-high (90-129mg/dl) triglyceride and borderline-low (40-45mg/dl) HDL-C serum levels, respectively. We also observed that 12.2% of overweight/obese participants had borderline-high (110-129mg/dl) LDL-C levels. It is important to appreciate that these boundaries are arbitrary and designation of plasma lipid level as borderline-high or -low is associated with risk of CVD. The reason is because risk of CVD increases continuously in relation to values greater or lower than the lower limit of borderline-high or -low. Two percent of the subjects in our study had combined dyslipidaemia and this was comparable to 2.95% observed in India⁶ but was lower than the 15.3% reported from Italy³⁴. This finding may suggest a lower atherogenic tendency in our population compared with Caucasians. Although the percentage of students with combined dyslipidaemia in the present study was small, it represents a call for greater vigilance because this pattern is associated with a strong atherogenic tendency. In both the overweight/obese and normal-weight adolescents, no case of high serum levels of triglyceride (≥ 130 mg/dl) or total cholesterol (≥ 200 mg/dl) was found. This finding is in contrast with the results of some other studies with larger sample sizes^{5,8,9,27}. The relatively small sample size in the present study may account for the negative finding. On the other hand, considering the established interaction between

diet, genes, and pattern of dyslipidaemia^{31,32}, it may imply that hypertriglyceridaemia and hypercholesterolaemia are not common among school-going Nigerian children and adolescents. A future study with a larger sample size will be required to further examine our negative finding. One-sixth of overweight/obese participants had borderline serum VLDL-C levels but this was not statistically different from those of normal BMI participants. The absence of high serum levels of triglyceride (≥ 130 mg/dl) in this study may explain the absence of VLDL-C in the abnormal category.

The present study has some strengths. The narrow age group studied minimized the effect of age on serum lipid levels, particularly cholesterol. In addition, overnight fasting for at least 12 hours minimized the effect of meals on serum lipid levels, particularly triglycerides. One limitation of the study is our inability to assess eating behaviour and physical activity levels of participants to provide for evidence-based preventive interventions. Despite this limitation, the study provided an insight into the magnitude of the problem of dyslipidaemia in children and adolescents in our population. The information so provided will be useful to health-policy makers, enabling them to implement action-oriented intervention for prevention and early control of CVD risk factors.

Conclusions

The prevalence of dyslipidaemia was high in both overweight/obese and normal BMI adolescent Nigerian students but higher in the former. Low HDL-C level was the most prevalent pattern of dyslipidaemia.

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