A Systematic Review Investigating the Effectiveness Of Socioeconomic Status On Obesity Outcomes Among Young Adults In The UK

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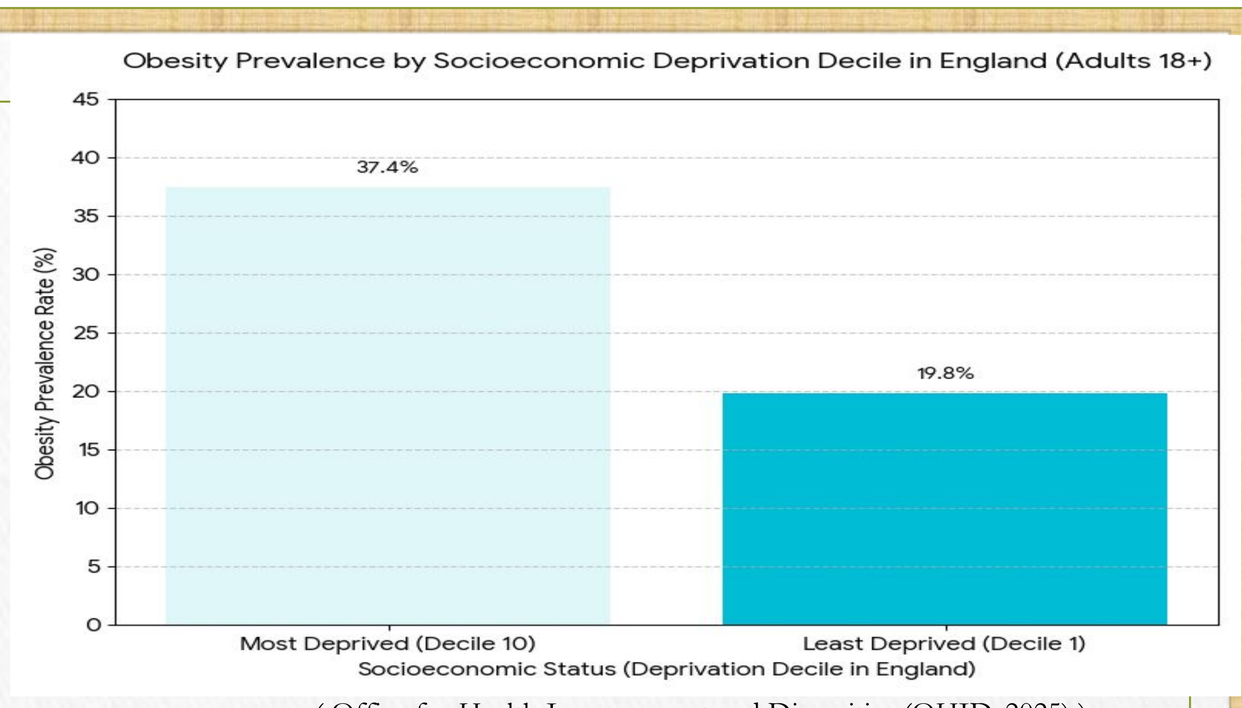
Prevalence

• In the UK, overweight and obesity are significant public health concerns that exhibit a distinct socioeconomic inequality (Obesity Health Alliance, 2024). According to estimates, 64.5% of adults in England were overweight or obese in 2023–2024, with 26.5% being considered obese. Since 2015–16, there has been an increasing tendency (OHID, 2025; ZAVA UK, 2025).

• The incidence of obesity is still closely associated with deprivation; in the most deprived districts, it is 37.4%, whereas among the least deprived, it is 19.8% (OHID, 2025; UK Parliament, 2025).

• Socioeconomic factors are particularly significant for persons between the ages of 18 and 35. Long-term health behaviours are shaped by this stage of life, which is characterized by changes including higher education, work, and adopting a family (Cuevas and O'Keefe, 2024).

• Parental income and education are examples of early-life socioeconomic determinants that have significant and long-lasting effects on adult weight (Goisis et al., 2016; Woodfield et al., 2021).



(Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID, 2025))

Rationale

• Critical Cohort: Obesity in young adulthood (ages 18 to 35) is essential that bad health habits formed at this time continue to affect future health and financial stability (Goisis et al., 2016).

• Mediation Gaps: Research confirms the SES-obesity link, but is limited in exploring the unified pathway where SES drives multiple negative health behaviours (e.g., poor diet, inactivity) which, in turn, cause obesity (Cuevas & O'Keefe, 2024).

• Service Equity Need: Low-SES groups have limited access to and lower use of specialized NHS weight management services, indicating a serious breakdown in equitable healthcare delivery (OHA, 2024).

Research Question, Aim, And Objectives

QUESTION :

What is the relationship between socioeconomic status and obesity among young adults in the United Kingdom? And How do lifestyle factors such as diet, physical activity, smoking, and alcohol consumption mediate the association between socioeconomic status and obesity?

AIM : To examine how socioeconomic status (SES) affects obesity among young adults in the United Kingdom.

OBJECTIVES :

1. To systematically synthesize the current literature assessing the relationship between objective measures of Socioeconomic Status (SES), such as income and education, and the prevalence of obesity in young adults (18-35) in the UK.
2. To examine the key lifestyle factors (e.g., diet, physical activity, psychosocial stress) that act as mediating mechanisms between low Socioeconomic Status and increased obesity risk.
3. To evaluate the influence of access to, and uptake of, healthcare and specialised weight management services across different socioeconomic strata.

Research Impact

• Policy & Funding Recommendation : Promote policies that go beyond personal accountability and focus on the socioeconomic factors that influence health, such as subsidies. Particularly important since obesity is a systemic problem that costs the NHS and the broader economy billions of dollars a year because of treatment and lost productivity (NHS Humber and North Yorkshire ICB, 2025).

• Primary Care : Encourage improved training for general practitioners and health coaches to provide trauma-informed treatment and proactively manage obesity in young adults from low-SES backgrounds (NICE, 2023). Effective care and uptake are actively hampered by a lack of readiness or the existence of stigma in primary care (Obesity Health Alliance, 2024; NHS England, 2024).

• Service Design : Ensure the provision of geographically fair, easily accessible, and digitally integrated weight management services (NHS England, 2024). Young people from economically disadvantaged regions see notable disparities in access and uptake due to the current uneven service (Obesity Health Alliance, 2023).

• Environmental Focus : Increase financing for green areas and regulate zoning to help local authorities decrease "obesogenic" settings (Burgoine et al., 2017). This tackles the issue of low-income households having to pay a disproportionately large share of their disposable income just to purchase a nutritious diet that the government recommends (Obesity Health Alliance, 2023).

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