

# A Comparative Assessment of the Nutritional Status and Dietary Practices of Adolescents in Public and Private Secondary Schools in a Community in the Federal Capital Territory

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Adolescence represents a nutritionally vulnerable period characterized by rapid growth and physiological change. However, this group remains neglected in public health policy, particularly in Nigeria. Hence, this study aimed to Assess and compare the nutritional status and dietary practices of adolescents attending private and public secondary schools in Kubwa, Abuja.

**Method:** A cross-sectional comparative study was conducted among 440 adolescents selected using a two-stage sampling technique. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire, including a 24-hour dietary recall, a food frequency questionnaire (FFQ), and anthropometric measurements (height and weight) to determine nutritional status according to WHO standards. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, and logistic regression at a  $p < 0.05$  significance level.

**Result:** A clear dual burden of malnutrition was identified. Adolescents in public schools had a significantly higher prevalence of stunting (21.4% vs. 12.7%) and a lower mean BMI. Those in private schools had significantly higher rates of overweight/obesity (32.7% vs. 25.9% for overweight; 12.7% vs. 2.3% for obesity). Dietary assessment revealed significant differences in meal frequency, snack consumption, and food diversity, with private-school adolescents demonstrating higher intake of energy-dense foods.

**Conclusion:** The findings highlight a socioeconomic gradient in adolescent nutrition, demonstrating a dual burden of malnutrition across school types. Context-specific school-based interventions, nutrition education, and strengthened implementation of Nigeria's School Health Policy are recommended to address both under- and overnutrition among adolescents.

**Keywords:** Adolescent Nutrition, Dietary Practices, Double Burden of Malnutrition, Stunting, Obesity, Dietary Diversity

