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Qatar girls embrace technology to tackle obesity, new study finds

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Young girls in Qatar appear more likely to use new technologies in programs designed to tackle childhood

obesity than boys, a new study has found. Furthermore, their mothers are also more likely to use social media to learn about a healthy lifestyle than their fathers, the research found.

The joint study was conducted on the use of digital health for obesity, with the clinical study led by Qatar University's Professor Mohamed Ahmedna using technology designed by the Qatar Computing Research Institute, part of Hamad Bin Khalifa University.

More than 50 children aged from 9 to 12 and their parents used wearable sensors, mobile and social media to collect data related to physical activity and food. The data was integrated with physiological data to gain insights about their health habits.

QCRI's Dr Luis Luque, who designed the digital technology, said it was encouraging that overwhelmingly, the mothers and daughters were found to be more proactive in responsibly using technology to improve their health in Qatar.

"This is important as they are not going to just improve their own health but also the health of their entire families and communities," Dr Luque said.

"Gender should be taken into account when designing digital health solutions in Qatar. Women can become leaders in using technology to improve health in the future."

Prof. Paul Gately, an expert in childhood obesity from Leeds Beckett University, said the finding that girls engage more than boys was for some surprising, but more research was necessary to understand why this was the case.

"The use of technology to support health-promoting lifestyle change to tackle childhood obesity is becoming more important, therefore it is important to understand what works and for whom so that we can continue to evolve and improve the tools necessary to promote healthy lifestyles," Prof. Gately said.

The research was funded by the Qatar National Research Fund under a project called ICAN, meaning "I can". For more information on the study, go to <https://www.hbku.edu.qa/sites/default/files/ican-study.pdf>