

The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Obesity and Physical Activity Among US College Students

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Introduction

- Lack of physical activity can lead to higher rates of being overweight or obese [1].
- Before the pandemic, students would get physical activity by walking to and from class, doing outdoor physical activity and utilizing the gyms on campus.
- Because of the stay-at-home orders and shelter-in-place due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it has been harder for college students to be physically active due to many gyms closing and the shift to online classes. This has contributed to an increase in sedentary behaviors [2].

Objective

- To determine whether physical activity has decreased and contributes to overweight/obesity as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic among U.S. college students.



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Methodology

- This cross-sectional study examined the levels of physical activity and overweight/obesity before and during the COVID-19 pandemic among college students (n=44) in the U.S.
- In April 2021, an online survey was conducted among U.S. college students via different social media platforms (i.e., Facebook and Reddit).
- The statistical analysis performed was a Bivariate Linear Regression via SPSS

Results

- Excellent physical activity levels dropped from 20.5% (n=9) before the COVID-19 pandemic to 11.4% (n=5) during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The number of students that reported their physical activity as poor, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, increased by 18.2% (n=8).
- Average physical activity decreased from 3 days to 1 day/week and there was a mean weight gain of 17 pounds.
- Our findings suggest that there was a statistical significance in the relationship between physical activity and weight during the COVID-19 pandemic ($p < 0.05$).

Results

Figure 1: Physical activity before the COVID-19 pandemic

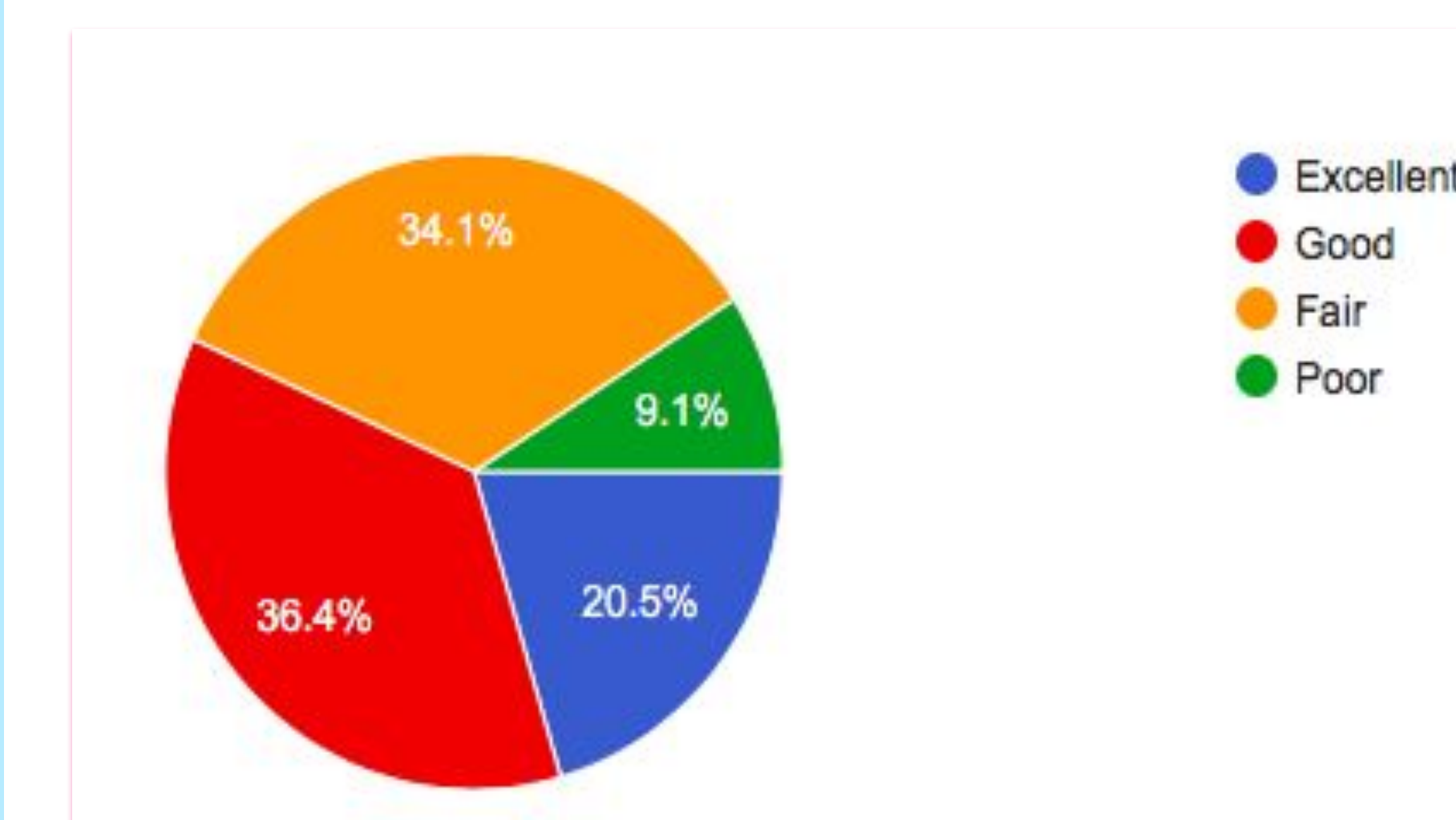


Figure 2: Physical activity during the COVID-19 pandemic

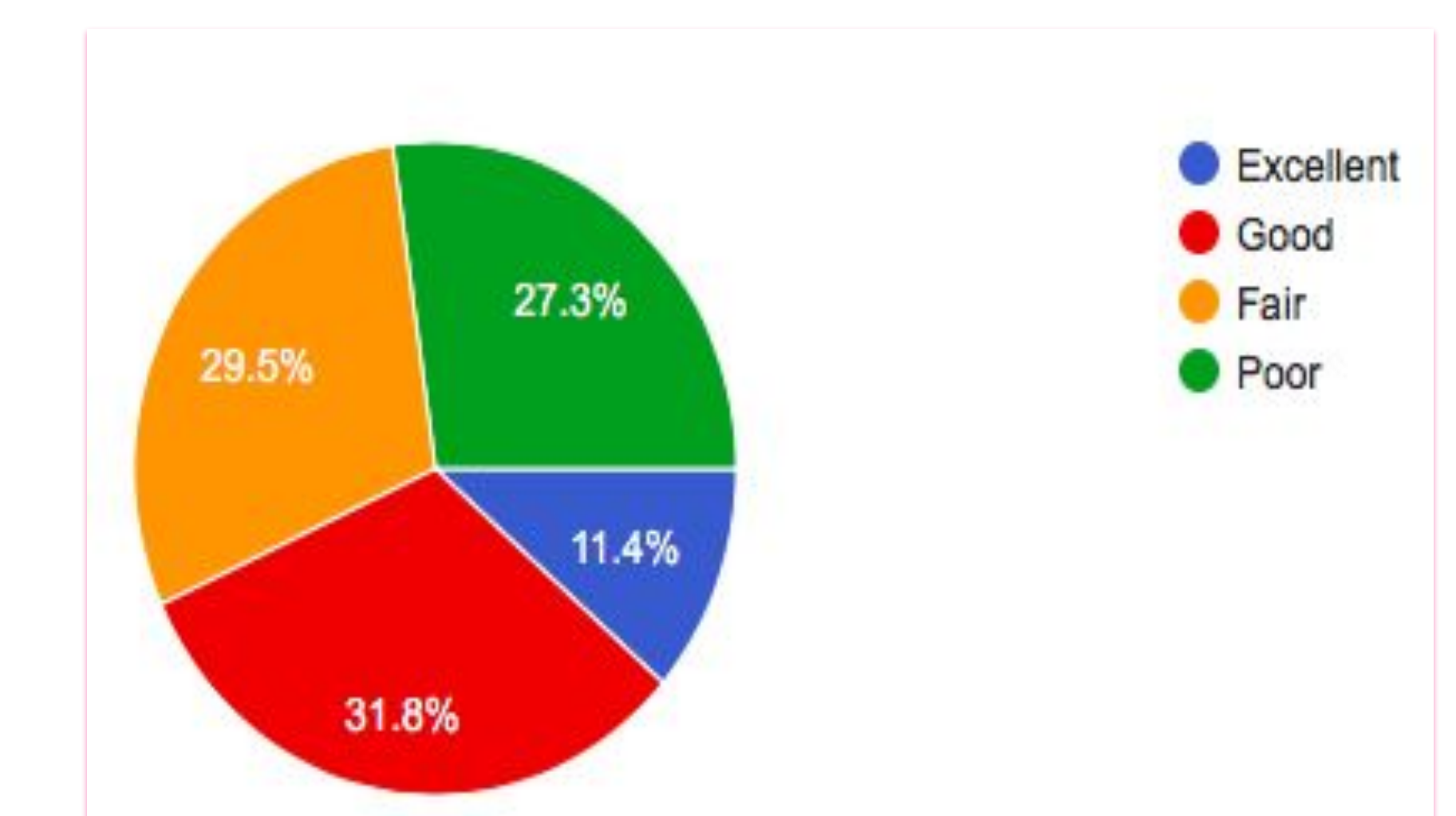
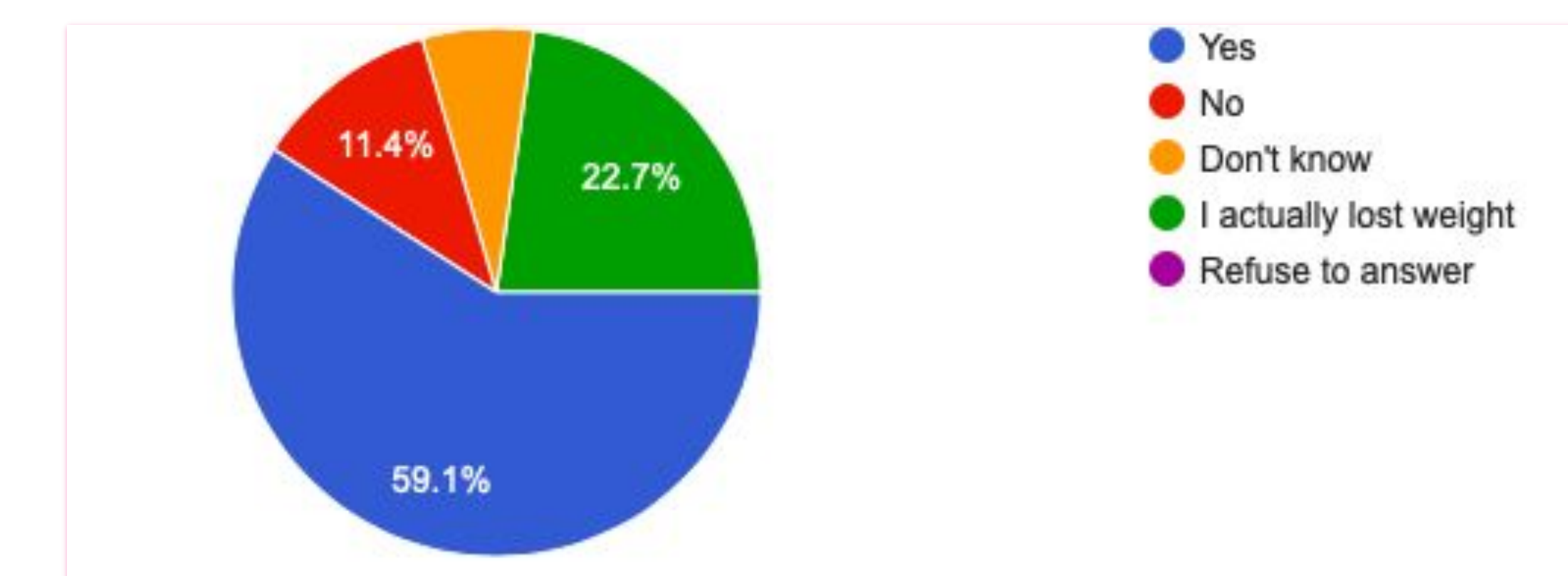


Figure 3: Do you think you may have gained weight during the COVID-19 pandemic?



Conclusion

- Overall, our findings indicate that among this sample of U.S. college students, physical activity levels decreased and weight gain increased due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Policy Implication

- Moving forward, colleges should consider providing free online workout courses and other activities to improve physical activity of their students.

References

- [1]: Hudson, G., & Sprow, K. (2020, June 09). Promoting physical activity during the covid-19 pandemic: Implications for obesity and chronic disease management. Retrieved February 11, 2021, from <https://journals.humankinetics.com/view/journals/jpah/17/7/article-p685.xml>
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