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Low-Income Children's Reported Motivators of and Barriers to Healthy Eating Behaviors: A Focus Group Study

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Background

Despite national attention to the childhood obesity epidemic, there are few US-based studies that directly ask children—especially children from low-income families and from multiple racial/ethnic groups—why they do or do not engage in healthy eating behaviors.

Objective

The purpose of this study was to identify motivators of and barriers to healthy eating behaviors, as reported by black, Hispanic, and white children from low-income families.

Method

Six gender- and race/ethnicity-concordant focus groups were conducted with 37 children who were aged 9 to 12 years and from families with an annual household income of \$40000 or less. Multiple strategies were used to employ a culturally sensitive approach to both data collection and data analysis (eg, a team of culturally diverse researchers utilized inductive qualitative analysis to analyze focus group transcripts).

Results

The motivators of and barriers to healthy eating behaviors most commonly reported across the 6 focus groups included social influence, taste, issues of availability, weight concerns, and the desire to be healthy. A variety of less commonly reported motivators and barriers were also discussed. Findings were generally similar across gender and race/ethnicity.

Conclusions

Children in this age range can indeed identify a variety of motivators and barriers that influence their engagement in healthy eating behaviors. Interventions targeting obesity and eating behaviors should include an assessment of children's own perceived motivators of and barriers to healthy eating.

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Keywords

children/adolescents; body weight; barriers; obesity; race/ethnicity; Latinos; African Americans

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