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Original Communication

Overweight in School-Aged Children Associated With Emotional and Behavioral Difficulties: Results From a National Sample

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Objective

To determine whether there is an association between perceived pediatric overweight and emotional/ behavioral difficulties among children ages 4 to 17 years in the United States.

Design

A cross-sectional study

Setting

Interview of an adult knowledgeable about a child's emotional and physical health. All statistical analyses were completed using SPSS 17.0.

Participants

A total of 7096 noninstitutionalized children aged 4 to 17 years identified in the 2007 National Health Interview Survey.

Outcome Measures

Included in the 2007 National Health Interview Survey were 7096 noninstitutionalized children aged 4 to 17 years. After controlling for age, gender, race, poverty status, education of mother, family structure, and health status, this study found that 7.4% of the children appeared to be overweight and 5.2% had emotional/behavioral difficulties. It also found that caregivers who indicated that their child had a problem with being overweight were more likely to report that the child experienced emotional/behavioral difficulties compared to caregivers who did not report perceived overweight in their child.

Characteristics of the children most frequently reported to be overweight included Hispanic race, older children (ages 15–17 years), and those with higher poverty rates and poorer health status.

Conclusion

The continual increase in pediatric overweight and associated emotional/behavioral difficulties suggests a need for replicable interventions that teach child caregivers to recognize and prevent overweight among vulnerable populations.

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Keywords

body weight; children/adolescents; psychology

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