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Parents' Perception of Overweight in Relation to Child Mood and Disordered Eating

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Abstract

Parental perception of their child's weight may impact child's psychological functioning; however, there is a dearth of literature examining this relationship. Data suggest that parental concern with child's overweight may be related to child distress and/or disordered eating. Yet, it is unknown if parents' perception of teens' overweight relates to child functioning. We examined 113 adolescent (12-17y; 14.4 ± 1.6) boys and girls (53% girls) with overweight or obesity (BMIz $2.0 \pm .45$) and their parents. Youth self-identified as 53% Caucasian or White, 27% Black or African American, 3.5% Asian, and 16.5% multiple races, unknown, or other. Parents reported on their perception of their child's overweight as either "somewhat/sometimes true" and "very/often true." Teens reported on their symptoms of anxiety and depression and whether they had experienced loss-of-control eating in the past month. T-tests and Chi Square analyses were used to analyze child factors based on parent perceptions. Compared to parents who reported "somewhat/sometimes true" (n = 51), parents who reported "very/often true" (n = 62), had children with significantly higher anxiety (p = .048) and higher likelihood of reporting loss-of-control eating in the past month (p = .039). There were no differences in symptoms of depression. Including sex, race, and BMIz as covariates did not alter findings. In summary, youth whose parents perceive their children as more definitively overweight are more likely to report symptoms of anxiety and disordered eating. Further data are needed to determine if parental perception is related to their adolescent child's overall well-being.

KEYWORDS: Parents' perception; overweight; psychological function; adolescent obesity

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ABSTRACT

Parental perception of their child's weight may impact child's psychological functioning; however, there is a dearth of literature examining this relationship. Data suggest that parental concern with child's overweight may be related to child distress and/or disordered eating. Yet, it is unknown if parents' perception of teens' overweight relates to child functioning. We examined 113 adolescent (12-17y; 14.4 ± 1.6) boys and girls (53% girls) with overweight or obesity (BMIz $2.0 \pm .45$) and their parents. Youth self-identified as 53% Caucasian or White, 27% Black or African American, 3.5% Asian, and 16.5% multiple races, unknown, or other. Parents reported on their perception of their child's overweight as either "somewhat/sometimes true" and "very/often true." Teens reported on their symptoms of anxiety and depression and whether they had experienced loss-of-control eating in the past month. T-tests and Chi Square analyses were used to analyze child factors based on parent perceptions. Compared to parents who reported "somewhat/sometimes true" ($n = 51$), parents who reported "very/often true" ($n = 62$), had children with significantly higher anxiety ($p = .048$) and higher likelihood of reporting loss-of-control eating in the past month ($p = .039$). There were no differences in symptoms of depression. Including sex, race, and BMIz as covariates did not alter findings. In summary, youth whose parents perceive their children as more definitively overweight are more likely to report symptoms of anxiety and disordered eating. Further data are needed to determine if parental perception is related to their adolescent child's overall well-being.

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