Adolescent Overweight and Obesity Predicts Anxiety in Emerging Adulthood

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BACKGROUND

- Cross-sectional studies and longitudinal studies have previously found inconsistent relationships between weight status and psychological correlates and disorders in adolescence and emerging adulthood.
- Most longitudinal studies have researched whether overweight or obesity increases risk for depressive symptoms.
- There is a gap in the research where few studies have prospectively researched whether weight status in adolescence predicts anxiety outcomes in emerging adulthood.
- Psychosocial theories suggest stigmatization of weight in adolescents’ peak time of social development can increase the risk of developing low self-esteem, body image, and anxiety symptomology.

OBJECTIVE

To investigate whether adolescents’ weight status predicted anxiety outcomes during emerging adulthood.

METHODS

Participants:
- 9th – 12th grade high school students from seven public high schools in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States.
- N = 240
- 53% female; Baseline Age: M = 16.1, SD = 0.8
- 51% Non-Hispanic White; 25% African American; 15% Hispanic/Latino; 3% Asian; 6% “other”

Procedure:
- Adolescents were recruited to participate in the study across three years, in the spring of 2006, 2007, and 2008.
- Baseline paper-based self-report questionnaires were administered during school by trained research personnel (T1).
- Follow-up self-report questionnaires of anxiety symptoms were completed online in 2014 (T2).

RESULTS

Table 1. Results of Linear Regression Depicting Baseline Overweight and Obese Status in Adolescence Predicting Follow-Up Total Anxiety Symptoms During Emerging Adulthood.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Baseline Predictor</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Beta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>46.40***</td>
<td>8.23</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.98</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Anxiety Symptoms</td>
<td>-0.14***</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>-0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overweight or Obesity</td>
<td>2.92**</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Gender coded as 1 = Girls, 0 = Boys. Race/Ethnicity coded as 1 = White, 0 = Non-White; Overweight or Obese coded 1 = Presence, 0 = Non-Overweight/Obese.

*** p < .001; ** p < .01; * p < .05

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CONCLUSIONS

- Findings indicate that being overweight and obese in adolescence may exacerbate anxiety symptoms in emerging adulthood.
- The relationship between overweight or obesity and anxiety may be prevalent due to stigmatization and less social support from peers.

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