

# Is there a link between obesity, chronic illness and bullying?

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Children who are overweight or obese are more likely to be victimised by bullying when compared to children who are not overweight.

The findings, to be presented today at the Annual Scientific Meeting of the Society for Academic Primary Care held at the University of Bristol this week, explore the prevalence of overweight and obesity in nine-year-olds and its associations with [chronic illness](#) and [bullying](#).

[Childhood obesity](#) is a major personal, family and public health challenge. Weight problems and obesity in [children](#) has increased dramatically throughout Europe in the past two decades. In addition to the increased likelihood of adult obesity with its associated [health risks](#), serious short-term physical and psychosocial consequences endanger the [wellbeing](#) of an affected child.

The researchers used a sample of 8,568 nine-year-old children and their families from the first wave of data collection from Growing Up in Ireland - the National Longitudinal Study of Children.

The study found obesity to be more prevalent in girls. In addition children, particularly boys with an abnormal body weight had a significantly higher rate of an ongoing chronic illness.

Children who were overweight or obese were a lot more likely to be victimised by bullying when compared to children who were not overweight.

Dr Udo Reulbach, Clinical Research Fellow in the Department of Public Health and Primary Care & HRB Centre for [Primary Care](#) Research, Trinity College Dublin, said: "Previous research has indicated that girls may be more susceptible to overweight and obesity than boys.

"Obesity and overweight are of major concern in Irish children with girls being more affected. It is associated with a higher likelihood of having chronic conditions and being bullied."

Data collection consisted of self-completion surveys with children in school and at home and interviewer administered questionnaires with parents and children in their home. International cut-off points for nine-year-olds for overweight and obesity were used defined to pass through body mass index (BMI) through BMI 25 and 30kg/m<sup>2</sup> at age 18 to classify weight categories. Analysis was based on statistically reweighted data to ensure that it is representative of all nine-year-olds in Ireland.

Further research is needed to explore the impact General Practitioners may have in communicating concerns about the weight of a child to parents.

Clinicians may also need to discover the effect of negative weight stereotyping on bullying in children. The much higher rates of overweight and obesity in Irish girls require further investigation and attention.

Obesity has been well established as a leading risk factor for cardiovascular disease, metabolic disease, musculoskeletal disorders, other chronic diseases, some cancers and an overall higher chance of premature death and disability.

In addition to the physical consequences, childhood overweight and [obesity](#) is associated with a range of other negative outcomes including

poor psychological and educational outcomes and social inequalities.

Provided by University of Bristol

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