

10- and 11-year-olds feel pressure to have a perfect body

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A study of 4254 Canadian schoolchildren has shown a direct association between BMI and satisfaction with their body shape. The research, published in the open access journal *BMC Public Health*, shows a linear response for girls, who were happiest when thinnest, and a U-shaped response for boys, who were unhappy when they were too skinny or too fat.

Bryn Austin worked a team of researchers from Harvard University and the University of Alberta, Canada, to investigate the relationship between size and body satisfaction, as well as the effects of rural/urban residence, [parental education](#) and income, and neighborhood household income.

She said, "There is a well-established relationship between poor body satisfaction and increased risk of disordered weight control behaviors, including vomiting, fasting, and use of laxatives and diet pills for weight control. Importantly, body satisfaction appears to be responsive to school-based interventions. To increase our understanding of body satisfaction and its links with BMI in childhood, we studied the prevalence of poor body satisfaction in prepubescent girls and boys, and its association with body weight and [socioeconomic factors](#)".

The researchers measured the height and weight of the 10-11 year old children and asked them to indicate how much they agree with the statement, "I like the way I look". Overall, 7.3% of girls and 7.8% of boys reported poor body satisfaction. For normal weight, overweight and

obese girls the prevalence of poor body satisfaction was 5.7%, 10.4% and 13.1%, respectively. For boys this was 7.6%, 8.4%, and 8.1%, respectively. Girls from parents with low educational attainment and residing in rural areas were more likely to report poor body satisfaction.

Speaking about the results, Austin said, "Poor body satisfaction among males with a low BMI may reflect the cultural ideal for males to attain both muscularity and leanness; whereas, among females, thinness remains the culturally defined ideal [body shape](#). Our finding that girls who reside in rural areas, controlling for BMI, are more likely to report poor body satisfaction suggests that appearance-related pressures may be higher within rural areas, or perhaps that girls in urban areas benefit from existing programs that may protect against decrements in body satisfaction".

More information: Body satisfaction and body weight: gender differences and sociodemographic determinants; S. Bryn Austin, Jess Haines and Paul J. Veugelers; [BMC Public Health](#) (in press); www.biomedcentral.com/bmcpublichealth/

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