

# Being obese can attract bullies

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Obese children are more likely to be bullied regardless of gender, race, socioeconomic status, social skills or academic achievement.

Those are the findings of the study "Weight status as a predictor of being bullied in third through sixth grades," which is available online now and will be published in the June issue of the journal *Pediatrics*. Julie C. Lumeng, M.D., assistant professor in the Department of Pediatrics and Communicable Diseases at the University of Michigan's C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, is lead author of the study.

Childhood obesity and bullying are both pervasive public health problems. Obesity among children in the United States has risen to epidemic proportions with 17 percent of 6 to 11 year olds estimated to be obese between 2003 and 2006. In addition, parents of [obese children](#) rate bullying as their top health concern and past studies have shown that obese children who are bullied experience more [depression anxiety](#) and loneliness.

The objective of this study was to determine the relationship between [childhood obesity](#) and being bullied in third, fifth, and sixth grades. While studies on bullying and obesity in children have been conducted before, none had controlled for factors such as [socioeconomic status](#), race, social skills and [academic achievement](#).

Further, this study is unique in that it specifically looks at the age range when bullying peaks - ages 6 to 9.

Researchers studied 821 children who were participating in the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development. These children were recruited at birth in 10 study sites around the country.

Researchers evaluated the relationship between the child's weight status and the odds of being bullied as reported by the child, mother, and teacher. The study accounted for grade level in school, gender, race, family income-to-needs ratio, racial and socioeconomic composition of the school, and child social skills and academic achievement as reported by mothers and teachers.

Researchers found that obese children had higher odds of being bullied no matter their gender, race, family socioeconomic status, school demographic profile, social skills or academic achievement.

Authors conclude that being obese, by itself, increases the likelihood of being a victim of bullying. Interventions to address bullying in schools are badly needed, Lumeng adds.

"Physicians who care for obese children should consider the role that being bullied is playing in the child's well-being," Lumeng says.

"Because perceptions of children are connected to broader societal perceptions about body type, it is important to fashion messages aimed at reducing the premium placed on thinness and the negative stereotypes that are associated with being obese or overweight."

While the study did not look into interventions to address bullying in this population, the hope is that these results could prove useful in doing so, Lumeng says.

Provided by University of Michigan Health System

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