

Study: Children tend to perceive obese physicians as less likeable, credible

May 9 2012, By Marc Ransford

(Medical Xpress) -- When comparing photos of overweight physicians with ideal size counterparts, children rate obese physicians as less likeable with less expertise, but youngsters found extra girth had no impact on trustworthiness, says a new report from Ball State University.

The research also indicates a physician's gender does not affect children's [perception](#) of [trustworthiness](#), expertise and likeability, says Shaheen Borna, a Ball State marketing professor who has conducted the first research project to examine perceptions of medical professionals by [youngsters](#).

"Like adults, children rely on peripheral clues, such as [personal characteristics](#), in evaluation of medical care and providers because they have little other information on how to judge the quality of the service. Overall, our findings are consistent with previous research in this area. Children tend to perceive obese people negatively, just as adults do."

"The Effects of Pediatrician's Obesity and Gender on Children's Perceptions" is based on interviews with 138 children ranging in age from 6 to 12. About 51 percent of the respondents were male, 79 percent were white and 89 percent were [American citizens](#).

Children viewed 16 photos of men and women wearing white uniforms. Half showed models within the range of ideal body weight. The other eight photos were manipulated so that the same people appeared to be 35 to 40 percent over ideal body weight.

Researchers used a photo of a ladder with seven steps, asking children if the doctor looked friendly and telling them the person most friendly would be at the top of the ladder with a lot of friends. An unfriendly doctor would be at the bottom of the ladder with few friends.

The study also found:

- Parental gender and obesity did not have an impact on children's perceptions of [health care providers](#).
- If a child is presented with two service providers, he or she will likely avoid the obese one.
- Age of the children had no impact on their perceptions.

Borna believes the research will contribute to filling a gap in the literature concerning children's perceptions of pediatricians' social influence.

"Researchers have used adults in the vast majority of studies related to the perception of service providers' credibility, including expertise, trustworthiness and likeability," he said. "However, they have overlooked children, who are familiar with pediatricians and come into frequent contact with [medical professionals](#)."

In the future, researchers should examine children's influence over a family's choice of family health provider as well as the relationship between family power structure and children's influence on what they see as negative situation or product, Borna said.

Provided by Ball State University

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