

Study finds socioeconomic status linked to weight gain and risk of obesity in African-American women

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Socioeconomic status across one's lifetime is related to weight gain and risk of obesity in African American women, according to a new study led by researchers from the Slone Epidemiology Center at Boston University. These findings currently appear online in the journal *Ethnicity & Disease*.

The researchers followed 23,601 [African American women](#) under the age of 55 from 1995 to 2009. These women were participants in the Black Women's Health Study, a follow-up study of the health of African Americans conducted by the Slone Epidemiology Center. The women provided information on their education, the education of their parents and updated information on their own weight over the follow-up period.

The researchers found that women whose parents had not completed high school gained more weight and more often became obese in adulthood than women who had a parent with a college degree. "However, if the woman herself had completed college, she was not at higher risk of obesity regardless of her parents' educational level," explained lead author Patricia Coogan, DSc, senior epidemiologist at the Slone Epidemiology Center and associate professor of epidemiology at the Boston University School of Public Health.

According to the researchers, low levels of parental and current education were associated with greater weight gain and higher obesity

risk. However, over a [lifetime](#), women at the highest level of current education (college graduate) had the lowest weight gain and risk of obesity regardless of their parents' educational achievement. Current educational level of "some college" did not provide the same protective effect on weight gain and obesity risk.

"Our results suggest that [women](#) who were disadvantaged in childhood, as indicated by low level of parental education, have greater weight gain as adults, but this tendency can be largely overcome if the woman herself has a high level of education," said Coogan. "A high level of education may be a marker of more access to healthy food and other factors that influence [weight gain](#)," she added.

Provided by Boston University Medical Center

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