

Study finds obese black and white women differ in how they view weight

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Low-income obese white women uniformly reported that weight negatively affects their lives and causes health problems. But half of their black contemporaries are comfortable with obesity, according to a new Regenstrief Institute and Indiana University Center for Aging Research study.

In spite of their differing views on [weight](#), neither race of middle-aged women in the study was attempting to lose weight. None of the [black women](#) said they felt external pressure to lose weight from friends or family members, but almost three-quarters of the white women said they did.

No one in the study indicated any intention to increase exercise or physical activity to lose weight, although 82 percent of the white women and 25 percent the black women said they had family or other support for physical activities.

"For both the black and white women we interviewed, food was central to social life and pleasure," said lead author NiCole Keith, Ph.D., a physical activity researcher who focuses on [health](#) disparities such as race, age and socioeconomic status and on preventive health interventions.

"Understanding how low-income urban middle-aged women feel about weight and the perceived social pressures to lose weight is important to reaching this high-risk and complicated—in terms of [weight loss](#)

—population. Focusing attention on the goal of improving health—better circulation, better mental health, increased mobility—not to numbers on the scale may be the most effective way to help this population get and stay healthier."

Dr. Keith is a Regenstrief Institute investigator and an IU Center for Aging Research Center scientist. She is also an associate professor of kinesiology in the School of Physical Education and Tourism Management at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis and vice president of the American College of Sports Medicine.

Ninety-one percent of white women in the study versus 69 percent of black women believed obesity to be an inherited trait, suggesting they thought nothing can be done to prevent it.

Both groups desired a quick fix approach to losing weight. One-quarter of the black women and three-quarters of the white women reported a history of using fad diet strategies and [weight loss supplements](#) to help them [lose weight](#).

According to the National Center for Health Statistics, nearly one-third of non-Hispanic white women and one-half of non-Hispanic black women in the U.S. are obese.

To determine attitudes toward weight loss, the researchers developed and conducted in-depth home interviews with 16 obese black and 11 obese [white women](#) who failed to attend Healthy Me, a free Eskenazi Health lifestyle weight loss program to which they had been referred by their health care provider at one of Eskenazi Health's nine urban clinics. The number of interviews performed for each group was reached when it became apparent to the researchers that no new information—no new themes, domains or dimensions—emerged within the group.

More information: "Weight Loss Attitudes and Social Forces in Urban Poor Black and White Women" is published in the January-February 2015 issue of the peer-reviewed *American Journal of Health Behavior*.

Provided by Indiana University

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