

Obese kids face stigma, flunk school: European research

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Obese children are far less likely to finish school than peers of normal weight, according to European research Thursday which also highlighted body image problems in kids as young as six.

And these problems are likely to become bigger and bigger as the waistlines of European [children](#) expand—led by Ireland with 27.5 percent of under-fives classified as overweight, according to findings presented at a European Congress on Obesity in Prague.

Britain had the second-highest rate with 23.1 percent, followed by Albania with 22 percent and Georgia with 20 percent, Bulgaria with 19.8 percent and Spain with 18.4 percent, said an analysis of data provided by 32 countries in the World Health Organization's 53-member Europe region.

Kazakhstan had the lowest rate at 0.6 percent, Lithuania 5.1 percent, conference host the Czech Republic 5.5 percent, and Tajikistan six percent.

People are classified overweight if they have a BMI ([body weight](#) index, a ratio of weight to height) of 25 and higher, and obese from a BMI of 30.

A second study presented at the congress said only 56 percent of children in Sweden who had received treatment for obesity completed 12 years or more of [school](#), compared to 76 percent of normal-weight

peers.

Differences in gender, ethnicity or socioeconomic status did not affect the result, said the research conducted among nearly 9,000 youngsters in Sweden.

The reasons were not clear, but study author Emilia Hagman of the Karolinska Institutet theorised that bullying might be a factor.

"If you are being bullied at school, you are feeling all this stigmatisation, you don't really want to go to school so maybe school absences could be one reason," she told AFP on the sidelines of the congress.

"Maybe you don't sleep well at night so how easy is it going to be to sit in the classroom the day afterwards and learn? There are many, many reasons."

A third research paper, conducted in England, found that children as young as six can be dissatisfied with being overweight.

Data was collected from 301 pupils from six years of age from eight primary schools in Leeds.

Of the group, 19 percent (59) were overweight or obese and had "higher body shape dissatisfaction scores on average than [normal weight](#) children," said a statement.

Girls had a higher dissatisfaction score than boys showing they had a greater desire to be thin even at this young age, according to the authors.

"Obesity prevention programmes need to consider psychological wellbeing and ensure that it is not compromised," said researcher Pinki Sahota of the Leeds Beckett University.

Globally, the WHO says 42 million children under five were overweight or obese in 2013.

Obese children experience breathing difficulties, bone breaks, [high blood pressure](#) and "psychological harm", according to a WHO factsheet.

Childhood obesity has been associated with a higher risk of obesity, premature death and disability in adulthood.

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