

Grandparental support helps reduce the risk of child obesity

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Juan Carreño de Miranda's "La monstrua desnuda" (The Nude Monster) painting.

According to an English saying, it takes a whole village to raise a child. A new study from Karolinska Institutet in Sweden has shown how important the support from grandparents could be. According to the study, which is being published in the journal *Pediatric Obesity*, emotional support from grandparents has a protective effect against child obesity, even with the presence of other risk factors.

Previous studies have shown that the parents' socioeconomic status affects the risk of children developing [obesity](#). But the effect of other family-related aspects on this risk has not been investigated to the same extent. Researchers from Karolinska Institutet and researchers in social anthropology at Oxford University have jointly investigated the importance of grandparental support in this context.

The study included 39 preschool-aged children from Stockholm County who had received treatment for obesity. Both the mother and father of the children answered detailed questionnaires in which socio-economic status was measured by education and income levels, work and domestic situation and by how much money they had left at the end of the month. After this, they answered questions about the kinds of support – and how much – they received from their own parents, i.e. the children's [grandparents](#). The questions aimed to establish the extent to which grandparents contributed daily support, e.g. help with washing and cleaning, financial support and [emotional support](#), which could create a sense of being seen and understood.

It transpired that when the parents received emotional support from their own parents, it had a [protective effect](#) against obesity in their children. Parental income is in itself linked to the BMI, Body Mass Index, in children. But the children of parents with a low income and a low level of emotional support had a higher degree of obesity than children whose parents had a low income but a high level of emotional support.

"Our study shows that emotional support from grandparents may have a preventive effect against [child obesity](#), which is a serious disease. These findings could, for instance, be incorporated into the planning of public health programmes that are aimed at reducing obesity in children. Greater social support for families with small [children](#) could help alleviate stress in parents, who will thereby be in a better position to make better food choices," says Paulina Nowicka, Associate Professor at

the Department of Clinical Science, Intervention and Technology at Karolinska Institutet.

More information: "Low grandparental social support combined with low parental socioeconomic status is closely associated with obesity in preschool-aged children: A pilot study." *Pediatric Obesity*, [DOI: 10.1111/ijpo.12049](https://doi.org/10.1111/ijpo.12049)

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