

Body image issues start in the playground

February 9 2016, by Karen Lombardi, Sciencenetwork Wa



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

While it seems common for teenagers to worry about their own body image, it is becoming increasingly clear that these concerns may have their roots in early childhood.

Studies have shown [children](#) as young as three years of age choose to play with thin playmates, stigmatise the overweight and obese and appear to be emotionally invested in the thin ideal.

These very young children have been shown to view those who are overweight as lazy, dishonest, unkind and unfriendly.

Is it any wonder then that children who experience such stigmatisation have been found to experience poor self-esteem and [body image](#) issues?

Body image is complex, and is influenced by a wide range of factors. Peers, the media and family are the most commonly mentioned, but sensitivity to cultural pressures and the ability to deal with these pressures are also important contributors.

Poor body image is linked with depression, anxiety and low self-esteem.

Focus on weight reduction can lead to body dissatisfaction

As Australia has the dubious title of "fattest nation in the world" researchers have questioned the relentless public health focus on [weight reduction](#), which they claim may be causing more harm than good.

While obesity may be related to an increased likelihood of developing a disease such as heart disease or diabetes, it is important to note that this focus has led to [body dissatisfaction](#) increasing globally, and being evident at earlier ages than seen before.

Research has shown that while parents seem to be aware of the importance of promoting healthy body image in their young children, they unconsciously transfer messages about their own experiences of body image, restrictive eating practices (or dieting), clothing and general health behaviours.

Until now, we have not been sure of the influence of early years

educators on the development of body image in very [young children](#).

And if they do, is it positively or negatively? In Australia, more than a half of all Australian children attend some form of care, with the proportion of children in long day care growing.

Since more than 919,400 Australian children under the age of 12 attended some kind of formal childcare and children spent an average of 27.2 hours per week in care, the role of early years educators in modelling knowledge, attitudes and behaviours related to healthy weight, diet and the development of body image should not be underestimated.

This article first appeared on [ScienceNetwork Western Australia](#) a science news website based at Scitech.

Provided by Science Network WA

Citation: Body image issues start in the playground (2016, February 9) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-02-body-image-issues-playground.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--