

Does a parent's perception of their child's weight impact on child weight gain?

April 21 2016



Credit: Robert Kraft/public domain

Researchers from the University of Liverpool and Florida State University College of Medicine have conducted a study on the effect the misperception of a child's weight by their parents can have on a child's actual weight.

Parents of children who are overweight often fail to accurately identify their [child's weight](#) status. Although these misperceptions are presumed to be a major public health concern, little research has examined whether parental perceptions of child weight status are protective against [weight gain](#) during childhood.

Dr Eric Robinson from the University of Liverpool's Institute of Psychology, Health and Society and Assistant Professor Angelina Sutin from Florida State University College of Medicine examined whether parental perceptions of a child's weight were associated with weight gain across childhood.

The results of their study, entitled 'Parental Perception of Weight Status and Weight Gain across Childhood', have been published today (21 April 2016) in the *Journal of Pediatrics*.

Parental perceptions

Data from the 'Longitudinal Study of Australian Children' was used to assess parental perceptions of child [weight status](#) and to examine changes in researcher measured child BMI-Z (Body Mass Index) scores across childhood, from 4 to 13 years old.

BMI-Z scores are measures of relative weight adjusted for child age and sex. Given a child's age, sex, BMI, and an appropriate reference standard, a BMI z-score (or its equivalent BMI-for-age percentile) can be determined.

3,557 Australian children and their parents participated in this study.

Future weight gain

Children whose parents perceived their weight as being 'overweight', as opposed to 'about the right weight', gained more weight (increase in BMI-Z score) from baseline to follow up in all analyses. This finding did not depend on the actual weight of the child; the association between perceiving one's child as being overweight and future weight gain was similar among children whose [parents](#) accurately and inaccurately believed their child was overweight.

Dr Eric Robinson, said: "Contrary to popular belief, parental identification of child overweight is not protective against further weight gain. Rather, it is associated with more weight gain across childhood.

"Further research is needed to understand how parental perceptions of child weight may counter-intuitively contribute to obesity."

Provided by University of Liverpool

Citation: Does a parent's perception of their child's weight impact on child weight gain? (2016, April 21) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-04-parent-perception-child-weight-impact.html>

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