

Research links youths' internet use and weight perception

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A University of Canterbury student has identified worrying social media trends, impacting weight perception among young people in our Pacific

communities.

University of Canterbury Master of Science (MSc) [student](#) Kat Lousich, of Kiribati descent, has used research from the longitudinal Pacific Islands Families Study to show the impact of increased recreational internet use on weight perception. The research is published in the *Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health*.

Lousich's recently published research, co-written with Dr. El-Shadan Tautolo, found [young people](#) in Pacific communities with over four hours of daily recreational internet use saw their weight as lower than it was. Nearly three in every five Pacific 14-year-olds underestimated their weight category. The findings show that high internet use had more impact on Pacific youths' perception of their weight than culture or income.

"Overall about 60% of the group perceived their [body size](#) to have a lower classification than what was measured and neither cultural orientation nor socio-economic deprivation was significantly related to weight misconceptions, but recreational internet use was," says Lousich.

Improving body-size awareness together with the reducing higher recreational internet use, is likely to be an important component in any population-based healthy weight intervention for Pacific youth.

"I hope this information can be used by [medical practitioners](#) across Aotearoa to provide insight into what [lifestyle changes](#) can support the health and well-being of Pacific patients," she says.

"Interestingly, European and Asian youth have been shown to overestimate their [weight](#), however there is not enough research to show whether social media impacts this but it would be interesting to one day see research conducted in that space."

Lousich hopes this same information can be taken from the study participants over time to track how their views may change and if there is a continued impact from high internet use.

More information: Katrina L Lousich et al, Relationship between perceived and measured body size among Pacific 14-year-olds in Aotearoa New Zealand: Findings from the Pacific Islands Families Study, *Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health* (2023). [DOI: 10.1111/jpc.16442](https://doi.org/10.1111/jpc.16442)

Provided by University of Canterbury

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