

Children of stressed parents may be prone to obesity

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Study, one of first to identify parental pressure as risk factor for weight gain, focused on Hispanic households.

(HealthDay)—Hispanic children are more likely to be obese if their parents have high levels of stress, a new study suggests.

Researchers compared [obesity rates](#) of Hispanic children in Chicago, Miami, New York City and San Diego with their parents' levels of stress at home and at work.

The children's obesity rates rose according to the amount of stress their parents faced—from 20 percent among kids whose parents had no stress to 34 percent among those whose parents had three or more stress factors. Stress factors included difficulties at work or in a relationship, among others.

After adjusting for other factors such as age, gender, place of birth and neighborhood, the researchers concluded that parents with three or more chronic sources of stress were twice as likely to have obese children than those with no stress.

The findings are to be presented Friday at the Obesity Society's annual meeting in Los Angeles. Research presented at meetings is typically considered preliminary because it's not subject to the same level of scrutiny as studies published in journals.

"Obesity and [chronic stress](#) were both prevalent among this Latino population, with more than one-quarter (28 percent) of children ages 8 to 16 with obesity, and nearly one-third (29 percent) of their parents reporting high levels of stress," study leader Carmen Isasi said in a society news release. Isasi is an associate professor of epidemiology and population health at Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York City.

Isasi said the study, one of the first to identify [parental stress](#) as a risk factor for [child obesity](#) among Hispanics, adds to the understanding of family influences on youngsters' weight.

"This research should encourage clinicians and health care practitioners to consider high stress levels as a warning sign for developing obesity not only in the adult patient, but also in the patient's entire family," Dr. Margarita Teran-Garcia, At-Large Mexico Council member for the Obesity Society, said in the news release.

The findings suggest "that special attention should be paid to adult patients who report experiencing high stress levels in this population, and providers are encouraged to consider behavioral counseling as one measure for [obesity prevention](#) and treatments," Teran-Garcia added.

Further research is needed to determine how parental [stress](#) increases a child's risk of obesity, to identify preventive measures, and to examine this link in other racial/ethnic groups, the researchers said.

More information: The U.S. National Institute of Mental Health has more about [stress](#).

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