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Weight Status and the Family Meal Environment in India

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Abstract

Background

Children's weight status is correlated to that of their mothers, and this pattern is believed to result in large part from family meal and activity environments. It may be that heavier parents create different environments, which have affected their own weight and will affect that of their kids. We explore these patterns in a developing-country setting, where obesity is believed to be a new phenomenon but already affects almost half of mothers of adolescents.

Objective

Is the meal environment different in families where the mother is and is not obese, in the context of an Indian town just beginning to experience the nutrition transition?

Methods

We collected data in Vijayapura, India in a developing region of Southern India. A representative school-based sample of 400 adolescents was collected in-home with data from adolescents and their mothers including direct anthropometry.

Results

Our results show 50% of overweight/obese adolescents reported eating outside the home, compared to under-/normal weight adolescents (36%). 82% of overweight/obese adolescents had an obese mother versus whereas none of the overweight/obese adolescents had a under-/normal weight mother. Significant differences between weight categories of adolescents were demonstrated at every level of family income reported; with higher income groups having significantly higher proportion of overweight/obese adolescents (19% versus 6% under/normal weight). Adolescents who were overweight/obese were forced to eat more by family members (57%) compared to normal/underweight adolescents (28%). A large proportion of all adolescents in the sample reported eating meals in front of the television (69–73%).

Conclusion

These findings suggest patterns of unhealthy weight in mothers and their adolescent child as well as overweight/obese adolescents being associated with highly educated, high-income families.



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