

PREDICTORS OF UNHEALTHY WEIGHT CONTROL BEHAVIORS IN ADOLESCENTS: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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BACKGROUND

- UWCB in adolescents is associated with mental illness or distress.
- This research contributes to the prevention of the development of eating disorders.
- Focus on an overall healthier lifestyle in adolescents.
- Summarize the predictors of UWCB in adolescents from recent literature.
- Understand the risk and protective factors of UWCB.

*UWCB = Unhealthy Weight Control Behaviors

DEFINITION

- UWCB
 - Behaviors not typically recommended for weight management, such as:
 - skipping meals
 - taking diet pills
 - taking laxatives.
 - forcing self to vomit
 - smoking more cigarettes

METHOD

- A literature search conducted using PsycInfo database.
- Search terms used
 - “Unhealthy weight control behavior” if appeared in title or abstract.
 - “Adolescents” or “adolescence” if appeared in title or abstract.
- 15 articles were eligible for review.

CRITERIA

- Articles published in peer-reviewed journals.
- Articles originally written in the English language.
- Articles published during or after 2010.
- Mean age of participants were between 13 to 17 years of age.

RESULTS

- 2 longitudinal studies, 2 cross-sectional studies, 1 short term intervention study, and one systematic review out of 15 articles.
- Short term intervention study focused on ways to prevent students from using UWCB during adolescence. *₁

MAJOR FINDINGS

1. Demographic variables, gender, and socio-economic status associated with UWCB.
 - Adolescent males are more likely to suffer from parents negative modeling of weight control
 - Adolescent females are more likely to have negative feelings about their weight.
 - Single parents, mothers with poor education, or parents with unstable employment have children with UWCB .

2. Stressors and maladaptive coping behaviors appeared as positive predictors of UWCB.

- Unstable employment
- The longer a child was exposed to poverty led to disengagement strategies.
- Families with many risk factors: violence, family, turmoil, family separation, substandard living conditions.

3. Socio-cultural pressure of weight appeared to predict UWCB.

- Consistent quick weight loss fixes on media.
- Parental expectations of child's weight and appearance.
- Bullies of peers in school or away from home.
- Doctors and other professionals encourage children to feel bad about their weight, if overweight.

DISCUSSION

- Research has shown weight focused intervention is harmful to adolescents.
 - Leads to UWCB
- Living a healthy lifestyle long term is more beneficial
 - Avoids predictors of mental health disorders.

GAPS in Research

- Socio-economic status is not always accounted for.
- Studies are restricted to low-income or high-income only.
- No measure for relations between long-term exposure to poverty and development of coping strategies in adolescents.
- Longitudinal studies focus only on female predictors of UWCB.

Kim, P., Neuendorf, C., Bianco, H. and Evans, G. (2015). Exposure to Childhood Poverty and Mental Health Symptomatology in Adolescence: A Role of Coping Strategies. Stress and Health. *1

Lin, Y. and Seo, D. (2017). Cumulative family risks across income levels predict deterioration of children's general health during childhood and adolescence. *2

Neumark-Sztainer, D., Wall, M. M., Story, M., & Perry, C. L. (2003). Correlates of unhealthy weight-control behaviors among adolescents: Implications for prevention programs. Health Psychology. *3

FUTURE RESEARCH SUGGESTIONS

- More longitudinal studies that compare adolescent males and females.
- Research that can compare low-income, middle class, and wealthy families with UWCB.
- Research that can compare multi-cultural, different race predictors of UWCB.
- Research on parent's bias on child's weight control behavior.
- Explore what is meant by dieting to adolescents.
- Intervention research needed to see if long term improvement in weight results from substitution of UWCB.

IMPLICATIONS

- Develop a healthier and more motivating learning environment in the classroom by eliminating weight shaming.
- Train teachers on discourse that will help build self esteem in their scholars.
- Implement bully-free classrooms by taking bullying behaviors seriously.
- Include conversations about the effects of long-term health into the classrooms. Provide articles that discuss healthy eating and exercise lifestyles.
- Provide intervention trainings for parents to understand a healthy lifestyle to be able to teach their child to live a healthy lifestyle.
- Provide more nutritional foods in the school instead of just limiting the amount of food given.

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