Comparison of Actual and Perceived Weight in Adolescents

Abstract:

**Purpose:** To compare actual weight status with perceived weight status among adolescents; and to explore factors that may influence weight perception, including age, gender, and ethnicity.

**Methods:** A modified Youth/Adolescent Questionnaire survey was completed by 42 middle school and high school students (18 females and 24 males) who were receiving a pre-participation sport physical examination. Participants resided in a school district with predominately Mexican American and low-income families. Responses to the survey were analyzed using chi-square analysis.

**Results:** Weight status of the sample was 59.5% normal weight, 38.1% overweight/obese, and 2.4% underweight. While the majority of adolescents correctly identified their body sizes, discrepancy between actual and perceived weight was reported by over 40% of the students. No significant differences were found, however, it is interesting to note that older adolescents, males and minorities tended to underestimate weight status more frequently than those who were younger, female and Caucasian. Students in the normal BMI range category that overestimated their weight, tended to be more concerned about their weight on a daily basis. On the other hand, overweight or obese students who underestimated their weight were less likely to show concern for their weight.

**Conclusion:** Similar to other studies, misperceptions about weight status is common among adolescents; yet, those with higher weight status or underweight may have the most concerns about weight. In particular, male adolescents and minorities frequently underestimated their actual weight. The findings also suggest weight perceptions may influence an adolescent’s personal weight concern.