COMPARING HEALTH BEHAVIORS AND CHILDCARE IN PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

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Purpose: Childhood obesity increases the susceptibility of multiple health conditions further on in life, including: diabetes, cardiovascular disease, orthopedic damage and respiratory complications (Water, 2011). As more mothers choose to hold jobs while raising a family, “reliance on child care has grown rapidly in the United States over the past three decades” (Story, Kaphingst & French 2006, p. 144). If such programs do not participate in health-promoting nutrition and activities, these children may be at greater risk of obesity than children with stay-at-home parents. The purpose of this study was to investigate the self-reported effects of maternal employment on the BMI and health behaviors of preschool aged children.

Methods: Participants in this study were the mothers of children ages 2 to 5 years of age from three clinics in Austin, Texas and surrounding communities. There were 53 total participants that were divided into two groups; these groups included mothers that were employed part-time or were unemployed (n=24) and mothers that were employed full-time (n=29). Each participant completed a 28-item survey that included questions about the health behaviors of her child.

Findings: The surveyed population of this study was categorized into two groups. Forty-five percent of mothers were unemployed or employed part-time (n=24) and fifty-five percent of mothers were employed full-time (n=29). There was not a statistically significant difference between the reported daily amounts of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, water, or milk consumed of children of part-time employed or stay at home mothers, and full-time employed mothers. In addition, there was no statistically significant relationship found between maternal employment status and consumption of sweets and chips between meals, consumption of sweetened drinks, adequacy of physical activity, excessive screen time, or sleep. The difference of BMI in the two groups had the following t-test result, t = 0.529 (p = 0.599). There was not a statistically significant difference between the mean BMI of children of part-time employed or stay-at-home mothers (M=18.0453, SD= 3.7946) and the mean BMI of children of full-time employed mothers (M=17.5540, SD= 3.01985).

Conclusions: This study did not detect any statistically significant differences among the health behaviors of the children between the two groups. However, the small sample size may not have allowed for statistically significant results. Further research is needed to determine whether or not the health behaviors of preschool aged children are affected by maternal employment.

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References: