

Research proposal on eating behaviors of obese children in the presence of their ...

[Health & Medicine](#), [Obesity](#)



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IS PARENTAL INFLUENCE A REFLECTION ON CHILD OBESITY?

Obesity has been increasing at an alarming rate, especially in the developed world. Obesity statistics have been rising to reach extremely high proportions. With this increase, diseases and other conditions associated with obesity have also been on the rise. The most affected demography is the young adults group. Obesity, however, has been seen to start from earlier in the lives of the people involved (Smith, 1999, p. 64). Part of the cause or facilitators for this increase in obesity is the parents, or so it has been suggested by various studies. What is certain, however, from many studies is that a big number of obese people especially the younger ones have a parent who played a role in their obesity. This parent, more often than not has been found to be the mother (Fraser, Skouteris, McCabe, Ricciardelli, & Milgrom, 2011, p. 92). According to this study, the mother, in almost all cases studied was the primary caregiver, therefore having a tremendous effect on the children.

Different studies have focused their research on different views of the parent child dynamics in relation to the increased number of obese young adults and children. The one thing they are all in agreement with is that there is a parental influence on the child's obesity risk. There have been studies such as children eating behaviors in relation to the mother's presence, obesity as affected by parental neglect and early age to young adulthood development of obese children among others.

Laessle, Uhl, Lindel and Muller (2001, p. 47) conducted a controlled laboratory study of the eating behaviors of 80 obese and non-obese children. The study included scenarios where the children's mothers were present and other scenarios when the mothers were absent. The aim of the study was to find out what effect parents, especially mothers had on their obese children's eating habits. The study alternated eating sessions, with the mother in the room and outside the room. Obese children were found to eat faster than normal weight children only when their mothers were in the room. The quantity of food consumed did not show a variation in relation to the mother's presence. However, the bite sizes of obese children increased with the presence of the mothers in the room. Obese children showed an accelerated eating rate towards the end of the meal, though this was not affected by the presence or absence of the mothers. The inference from this study was that mothers had a profound effect on the eating behaviors of their children. The mothers' presence in the room decreased self control of the obese children rather than increase it. Mothers are generally the enforcers in the family structure when it came

to nutrition. Hence, they prompted their children to higher eating rates and finishing all the food served during the younger ages. The children were eventually conditioned such that the presence of the mother alone was a stimulus for irregular eating behaviors.

Parental Neglect and Obesity in Young Adulthood

Family dynamic affects children's growth and the obesity factor. Children who grew up in homes where parents did not offer support were significantly prone to obesity in their later years in young adulthood (Lissau & Sorensen, 1994, p. 126). Overprotective parents also increased risk of obesity in their children though not as significantly as their unsupportive counterparts. The family structure of the children, that is a single parent home or two parents home or none of the parents were present, did not show any significant effect to the risk factor of obesity in children. Well groomed children were observed to have a reduced risk for obesity, as opposed to the children considered dirty, who showed a 9.8 times higher risk for obesity. The level of support children received in their childhood lives determined their vulnerability to obesity either in their childhood or their young adult life.

Parental Parenting Styles

Different parents have different ways of raising their children. Parenting styles vary according to the parents' main characteristics. There are several observable ways of parenting such as authoritarian, authoritative and permissive parenting (Fraser et al., 2011, p. 52). Children, who were raised using the permissive

parenting method, were found to have poor eating habits such as eating unhealthy foods. These habits were mostly due to low monitoring by parents, who mostly allowed the children to make their own nutritional decisions every time. Permissive parents were also observed to exact more pressure to eat on their children than other parents. This combined with the poor eating habits increased risk of obesity on the children.

Fathers were found to have a greater effect on pre-school children obesity than mothers. Fathers' parenting styles determined the risk factor of their children becoming obese before they got into the schooling system. The study showed that warm, supportive and firm parenting protected against early childhood overweight and obesity (Fraser et al., 2011, p. 79).

Another study showed that transition periods in the child's life offered opportunities of systematic reorganization, intervention and change in the child's growth and risk of obesity (Anzman, Rollins, & Birch, 2010, p. 101). A child's earlier life is narrow and offers perfect opportunities for parents to direct the child in proper healthy eating habits before their ecology becomes complex. When a child's eating behavior is formed properly during early stages in life the risk of the complexities of life getting in the way of healthy eating habits is markedly reduced (Ricardo, Seidell, Swinburn & Waters, 2010, p. 62).

The studies discussed here and others conducted by various experts in the field, show a significantly prominent role of the parent in the development of their children. The key to reducing the ever rising obesity rates may lie with

the parents. How parents go about raising their children will affect how the latter develops in terms of weight. Eating habits are the best known cause for the obesity statistics being observed among the young demographic in the world and especially in the developed countries. The role of parents in the obesity factor starts from the very early age of birth to the later years of adolescence. Even though the parents cannot control the eating behaviors of the children in the school dynamic, they have an extraordinary opportunity to teach their children positive eating behaviors before they start school, and in the meals they share together. There is a responsibility for the wider community especially the education sector, to ensure that the children they take care of develop the right kind of eating behavior and have access to healthy food in the school system.

Parents, especially mothers, as the primary caretakers ought to realize the effect of their parenting on their children's vulnerability to obesity. They ought to read widely and consult experts on the best way to deal with their children's risk of obesity.

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