Child abuse and obesity

• 1 in 6 youth obese
• 1 in 58 abused or neglected
• Obese adults report higher rates of sexual abuse, physical abuse, neglect, and psychological abuse than nonobese adults
• Emerging data shows correlation between child abuse and obesity in childhood
  • Schneiderman et al. 2011
  • Knutson et al. 2010
  • Steele & Buchi 2008
Purpose

- Lacking data on all forms of child abuse
- Lacking national data

1. Estimate the prevalence of obesity for children ages 2 through 17 years of age investigated for child abuse and neglect in the US

2. Compare rates to national peers

3. Examine sex- and age-specific associations between obesity:
   1. Race/ethnicity
   2. Abuse and neglect type
   3. Investigation case characteristics
Methods


• Closed investigations from Feb 2008 to April 2009
• Substantiated and unsubstantiated
• Open and closed cases following investigation
• 2 to 17 year olds with valid weight data (N=2948; 10% missing)

Measures

• Obesity
  • ≥95th percentile of weight-for-age CDC growth chart
  • Caregiver report
Measures continued

- Abuse and neglect
  - Most serious type reported (neglect; physical abuse; sexual abuse; other)

- Case characteristics
  - Family material hardship
  - History of investigations

- Substantiation

Analysis

- Sex specific models by developmental age
  - 2-5; 6-10; 11-17
Results

25.4% obese compared to 17% of national peers
Results

Girls 2-5 with sexual abuse allegation 3.54 OR
Boys 12-17 with physical abuse allegation .24 OR
Girls 12-17 with history of investigation 3.97 OR
Conclusions

Concerns:
• High rates of obesity in preschool age children
• Higher rates of obesity for boys than girls
• Different racial/ethnic profiles

Limitations:
• Caregiver estimates of weight
• Weight-for-age instead of BMI
• Maltreatment measure
• No comparison group of non-abused children

Implications for the future
Contact information

Jesse J. Helton
Jhelton2@illinois.edu

Janet M. Liechty
jliechty@illinois.edu