

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WEIGHT STATUS AND EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS AMONG SPANISH PRESCHOOLERS

Iris Pérez-Bonaventura^{1,2,4}, Roser Granero^{1,3}, Lourdes Ezpeleta^{1,2}

¹Unitat d'Epidemiologia i de Diagnòstic en Psicopatologia del Desenvolupament, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB) ²Departament de Psicologia Clínica i de la Salut, UAB ³Departament de Psicobiologia i Metodologia de les Ciències de la Salut, UAB ⁴Department de Salut Mental, Corporació Sanitària i Universitària Parc Taulí, Sabadell.

Childhood obesity is a public health concern that poses serious threats to children's health [1]. Recently, research has focused on understanding the reciprocal relationships between obesity and mental health but only a few community studies have examined this association in very young children. This age, the preschool years, furnish a critical window for obesity prevention. The aim of this study is to investigate cross-sectional associations between weight status and emotional and behavioral problems in a community sample of Spanish preschool children aged 3 to 5.

The participants were 622 three-year-old children and their parents randomly selected from the census of preschool facilities centers in Barcelona [2]. The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire and Diagnostic Interview for Children and Adolescents were used to assess for emotional and behavioral problems. Two measures of weight status for preschool children were used according to the World Health Organization age- and sex-specific criteria: BMI z-scores and overweight status [3].

Overweight was associated with higher percentages of ODD, ADHD and with higher mean scores for peer relationship problems. A higher BMI z-score was associated with higher scores on conduct, hyperactivity and total problems scale, with a lower pro-social behavior levels, and with higher percentages of ADHD and conduct disorder.

To our knowledge, this is the first study that assesses the relationship between weight status and emotional and behavioral problems, using a diagnostic interview based on DSM-IV-TR taxonomy. The results suggest that higher BMI and overweight status are associated with a broad range of psychological problems at very young ages.

[1] M. de Onis, M. Blössner and E. Borghi E. Global prevalence and trends of overweight and obesity among preschool children, *Am J Clin Nutr*, 92 (2010) 1257-64.

[2] L. Ezpeleta, N. de la Osa, and J.M. Doménech. Prevalence of DSM-IV disorders, comorbidity and impairment in 3-year-old Spanish preschoolers. *Soc Psychiatry Psychiatr Epidemiol*, 49 (2014) 145–155.

[3] World Health Organization Multicentre Growth Reference Study Group. WHO child growth standards based on length/height, weight and age. *Acta Paediatr*, 450 (2006) 6–85.