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The relationship between adolescent obesity and quality of life

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Abstract

Background: In addition to its mortality and morbidity burden, obesity may also affect functioning and well-being. This presentation explores the relationship between obesity and quality of life in adolescents from different ethnic groups.

Methods: Adolescent’s height and weight were measured by trained field workers, and weight status categorised according to the International Obesity Task Force body mass index cut-off points. The Assessment of Quality of Life (AQoL-2) - a utility-based instrument suitable for estimating adults quality of life within an economic evaluation was modified for adolescent use and adjusted for adolescents in each country using the time trade-off method. The AQoL-2 was completed by 15,481 adolescents from Australia (3,059), New Zealand (Pacific 2,478, Maori 832, Asian 436, European 442), Fiji (Indigenous 2,507, Indian 3,457) and Tonga 2,024. Summary and dimension (physical, social, mental, coping, pain and sensory) quality of life scores were calculated.

Results: The mean quality of life scores ranged from Tongans (0.49) to Australians (0.80) Relative to their healthy weight peers, overweight and obese adolescents from the Australian (p’<0.001), Pacific (p’=0.001) and Maori (p’=0.016) ethnic groups experienced significant lower quality of life. For all other ethnic groups, there was no significant relationship between body size categories and quality of life scores. Australian adolescents experienced the greatest utility loss attributable to obesity (loss=0.06). Fijian adolescents (both Indo-Fijians and Indigenous Fijians) showed the least variability in quality of life due to overweight and obesity. For groups experiencing a significant quality of life loss due to obesity, the greatest losses were in the coping dimension (for Australian and Pacific adolescents) and the social dimension (for Maori adolescents).

Conclusions: The impact of obesity on quality of life varies substantially by ethnic group within the Pacific. Obesity is associated with a significant loss in quality of life for Australian adolescents, and to a lesser extent, Pacific Islanders and Maori in New Zealand.

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