

Parental Concern for Child Body Size: Findings from School-based BMI Screening Policy

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Introduction

- School body mass index screening (SBMIS) has been recommended by public health leaders as a policy strategy to raise parental awareness of their child's body size and related health risk.
- Parents of 12 million public school children in nine states receive SBMIS reports with demonstrated improvements in parental awareness.
- This suggests progress toward prevention but little is known about parent concern about child body size.
- Whether parents are concerned about their child's body size and the factors associated with such concern are unclear.

Methods and Materials

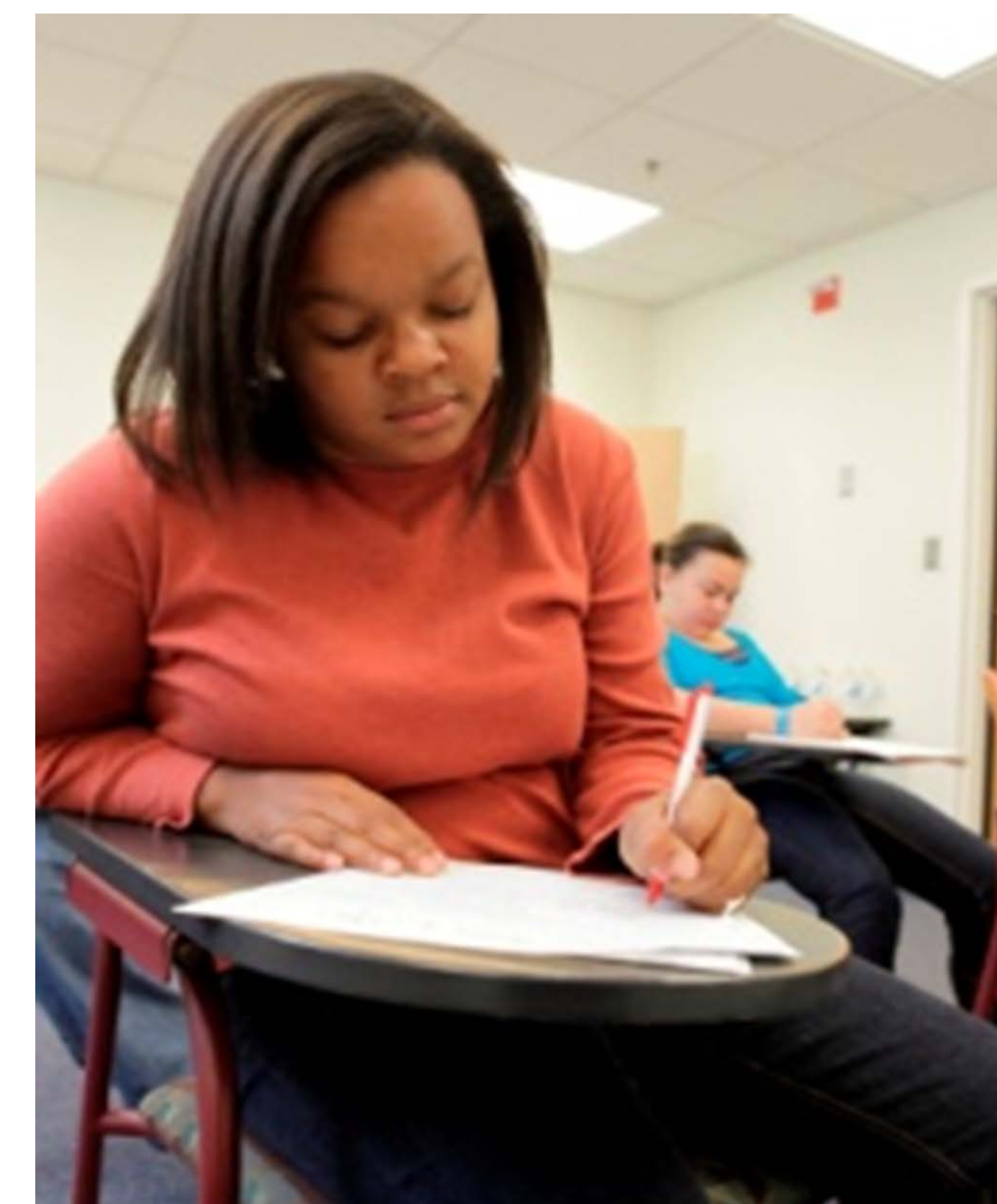
- This large (N=1,469) cross-sectional study examined parental concern about child body size for elementary-age children (ages 5-12 years).
- All children were enrolled in Pennsylvania public schools (N = 31) that implemented statewide SBMIS policy.
- Parents received their child's objectively measured BMI report from the school approximately 6 weeks before completing the study questionnaire in Spring 2011,
- Linear regression models were used to examine associations of parental concern with child factors (age, gender, child body size) and parent weight perceptions.

Results

- Most respondents were female, 30-49 years of age, married and described their own weight as "About Right" or "A Little Overweight." (Figure 1)
- School reports indicate that 16.5% of children were overweight and 18.7% were obese.
- Parent concern for child body size was significantly associated with child gender, body size, and parent perception of her/his weight but not child age (all p < 0.001).

Parent Age at Time of Survey		
Variable	Frequency (n)	Percent
Under 25	8	0.54%
25-29	86	5.9%
30-39	676	46.1%
40-49	609	41.4%
50+	89	6.1%
Parent Gender		
Male	128	8.7%
Female	1,341	91.3%
Parent Perceptions of their Weight		
Very Underweight	5	0.34%
A Little Underweight	76	5.2%
About Right	672	45.8%
A Little Overweight	575	39.0%
Very Overweight	141	9.6%
Child Gender		
Male	727	49.5%
Female	742	50.5%
Parent Perception of Child's Weight		
Very Underweight	21	1.4%
A Little Underweight	197	13.5%
About Right	980	67.2%
A Little Overweight	224	15.4%
Very Overweight	36	2.5%

Figure 1: Survey Respondents: Demographics and Responses



Source: Yale Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity:

- Regression analysis showed significant impact of gender and child BMI on parent concern (p value < 0.001, R²:0.208), with parents more likely to be concerned for girls than for boys. (Figure 2)

	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	pr (> t)
Intercept	-0.08978	0.25824	-0.35	0.7282
Child Gender	0.18579	0.07154	2.6	0.0096
Child Age	0.01747	0.02093	0.83	0.4044
Child BMI	0.0158	0.00118	13.36	<0.0001
Parent Weight	0.09976	0.04807	2.08	0.0384

Figure 2: Regression Analysis of Parental Concern

Conclusions

- Parent concern was significant for girls and for overweight or obese children overall.
- Concern for daughters was independent of child body size. Unwarranted concern is potentially harmful and may be linked with restrictive practices¹⁻³
- SBMIS should include gender-specific messages and parent education to promote healthy child growth.

References

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