

Childhood Obesity: Epidemiology- A Social and Cultural Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to explore the social and cultural aspects of the epidemiology of childhood obesity among local populations in Houston, TX. **Methods:** Review of recent journal articles, studies, and surveys regarding the relationship between childhood obesity and other social factors, including race, ethnicity, culture, socioeconomic status, and parental behaviors. Literatures should contain not just quantitative data or listing of social and cultural factors affecting childhood obesity, but also discuss how these factors accomplish that. Literatures are analyzed and compared for consistencies and inconsistencies. **Results:** The findings are divided into three sections: socioeconomic factors, ethno-cultural factors, and familial and parental influences. Socioeconomic factors include living environment and financial limitations of low-income neighborhoods. Ethno-cultural factors include cultural context of food and eating habits, as well as traditional uses and meanings of food within ethnic groups and society and differences in body image perspectives. Familial and parental influences include how parental beliefs and perception of obesity affect feeding behaviors, diet, and physical activity level of children. **Conclusions:** Childhood obesity goes beyond the genetic and environmental implications. The socioeconomic and ethno-cultural factors, along with familial influences are also important determinants involved in this complicated relationship surrounding childhood obesity. Research into attitudes and behaviors of minority populations, from the community to the family level, is an important and needed area of research. Understanding the interaction and interdependence of genetic, environmental, and social influences would provide a strong base for educating and addressing misconceptions and unhealthy beliefs among health care providers, educators, and parents regarding childhood obesity.

KEY WORDS: Childhood Obesity, Epidemiology, Socioeconomic, Ethno-cultural, Family Influence, Parental Influence