

## **Body Weight Perceptions and Contributing Weight Gain Factors in Scandinavian, French, and American College Students**

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Worldwide obesity has more than doubled since 1980. By 2014, 39% of the world's adult population was considered overweight and 13% overweight. **PURPOSE:** To compare the differences of body weight perception and perceived contributing weight gain factors in Swedish, Danish, French, and American college students. **METHODS:** A survey including questions regarding self-reported height and weight, body weight perception, and perceived contributing weight gain factors was distributed to Swedish, Danish, French, and American college students. A total of 487 students responded to the survey (Sweden n=94; Denmark n=97; France n= 200; US n=96). Based upon their self-reported height and weight, participants were classified into one of three Body Mass Index (BMI) categories: underweight (BMI<18.5), normal weight (BMI =18.5-24.9), or overweight (BMI  $\geq$ 25). Without knowledge of their BMI category, subjects were then asked to classify themselves into one of three perceived categories (underweight, normal weight, and overweight). Lastly, participants were asked to rank perceived factors contributing to weight gain in their own respective country. **RESULTS:** When comparing their perceived body weight category to actual BMI category, 77% of Swedish, 80% of Danish, 69% of French, and 80% of American students classified themselves correctly. The results were as follows: 42.55% of American respondents thought lack of physical activity was the greatest contributing factor, 76.09% of Swedish and 62.37% of Danish respondents thought overconsumption of food was the greatest factor, whereas 31.5% of French respondents stated that sugar was the greatest contributing factor to weight gain in their country. **CONCLUSION:** A majority of participants were able to correctly classify themselves as underweight, normal weight, or overweight according to BMI standards, regardless of their nationality. However, American students attributed lack of physical activity, French students attributed sugar, while both Swedish and Danish students attributed overconsumption of food to be the greatest contributing factor to weight gain in their respective countries. This information can provide implications for healthcare professionals who may want to tailor their efforts of preventative and educational strategies toward these content areas.