

Weight Stigma between English and Spanish-Speaking Families of Pediatric Cancer Survivors: A Mixed Methods Study

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Main findings: There are disparities between English and Spanish speakers for weight stigma. Spanish-speaking families expressed greater concern about their child's weight and reported more instances of teasing, harassment, and bullying. While English-speaking families focused more on guilt related to dietary behaviors. Further research is needed to investigate weight stigma and health outcomes among Spanish-speaking families, as well as to develop culturally relevant interventions.

Background:

- Weight stigma impacts pediatric cancer survivors' (PCS), quality of life, self-esteem, and lifestyle behaviors (e.g., physical activity and nutrition).
- Cultural differences in weight stigma and their impact on health outcomes are under-explored despite elevated rates of obesity in racial and ethnic minority groups.
- This project aims to examine the impact of weight stigma between English and Spanish-speaking families with PCS on health outcomes.



Methods:

- This study was a mixed methods analysis of baseline data from a randomized controlled trial, NOURISH-T+, a lifestyle behavioral modification intervention for PCS living with overweight/obesity.
- A linear regression model and chi-square analysis were used to compare 8 weight-related questions by language preference (English vs. Spanish-speaking), current BMI, and child BMI at diagnosis.
- Two research team members conducted grounded theme analysis.

RESULTS:

- A total of 120 parent-child dyads (n=240) were included in this analysis; 40% (n=48) were Hispanic/Latinx, and 28% (n=33) Spanish-speaking, with parents and child average (SD) BMI of 34.8 (8.8) kg/m² and 97th (5) percentile, respectively. The regression was statistically significant ($R^2=0.73$, $F(1, 119) = 25.77$, $p<.05$). Spanish-speaking parents with a higher BMI were significantly more likely to be concerned about their child's weight ($\chi^2(1, 119) = 10.7$, $p=.03$).
- Both English and Spanish speaking families dealt with weight stigma, there were slight differences in their experiences. English speaking families expressed more guilt about personal dietary behaviors. Spanish speaking families shared more serious instances of teasing, harassment, and bullying (weight-related or not).

Language and Perception

"In fact, there is a conflict in the family because I have a sister like her. She does have conflict with her body. And she thinks that being thin, thin, extremely thin is the best.... I tell [child] that I don't want him to lose too much weight because when this disease comes... his bones are going to need food. They tell me that I'm the only one who thinks that being plump you look good."

Environment and Change

"Whatever they look for there [on the internet], they will find. Then you're going to find people who are going to tell you you're useless, you're worthless, you're such and such or your parents don't want you. And I'm very sorry, I always tell him to remember that this is fictitious..."

"Honestly, because it's not just how you look, but how you feel. So, that is what I have tried to convey to them."

Socialization

"...he told me, 'Don't call me chubby anymore, even if it's affectionate, I don't like that.'... But yes, it did affect him, like the whole family telling him a lot, the one who is fat.... Sometimes he starts to cry. I mean, 'I don't want to be called ugly fat anymore, it makes me feel bad.'"

Future Directions:

The research team will examine more sessions to study the extent of the differences in the experience of weight stigma between English and Spanish speakers. Findings will be used to discuss how culturally interventions can be implemented as well as how common the experience of teasing, harassment, and bullying is among PCS with overweight/obesity.

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