GLOBAL CULTURAL PERCEPTIONS OF CHILDREN WHO ARE OVERWEIGHT

Sitah Alshutwi, MSN, RN; April L. Yerges, BSN, RN, CPN; Moudi S. Albargawi MSN, RN. (Doctoral Students), Julia Snethen, PhD, RN, Associate Professor, Sheryl Kelber, MS
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee

Background: Childhood overweight has spread globally, yet one cannot assume that all cultures have the same perceptions of children who are overweight. Psychosocially, weight bias can have a negative impact on children’s emotional well-being, particularly if there is bias among healthcare providers towards children who are overweight. Optimally, weight bias should be addressed globally at the student level, to prevent the development of weight bias as a student becomes a healthcare provider. Globally examining nursing students’ perceptions toward childhood obesity will help in developing culturally specific strategies to prevent weight bias. The purpose of this study was to explore Thai nursing students’ weight bias related to childhood obesity.

Sample: Undergraduate Thai nursing students (N = 439). A majority of the participants in this study were Thai (100%), female (94%), 18-22 years of age (74%), and self-identified as “normal weight” (87%).

Design: Cross-sectional, descriptive study. Fat-Phobia Scale-Short form (Bacon, Scheltema, & Robinson, 2001); the scale was translated into Thai (Cronbach’s α = 0.813).

Results: Student nurses in Thailand reported overwhelmingly positive perceptions of children that were overweight, indicating they were secure (65%), had high self-esteem (53%), were self-sacrificing (67%), active (58%) and strong (53%). Additionally, the students were also pragmatic, reporting that a majority of children who were overweight liked food (71%) and overate (54%). Thai student nurses who self-identified as overweight reported more negative views of children who were overweight.

Implication: The findings suggest not all cultures have negative perceptions of children who are overweight. Greater understanding of cultural differences in weight perceptions could improve the care of children who are overweight.