Student Nurses Perceptions of Overweight Children by Academic Level.

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Background: Nurses are important in engaging overweight children in health promotion activities. In order to perform health promotion activities within this client population, nurses need to have accurate knowledge of children who are overweight. One way for nurses to develop knowledge about children who are overweight is through their nursing student educational preparation. Additionally, ensuring student nurses receive accurate information about children who are overweight can assist in their provision of care. However, only a small amount of research has been undertaken to discover student nurse perceptions of children who are overweight.

Purpose: The purpose of this investigation was to evaluate how student nurses view children who are overweight. The secondary aim was to examine whether there were differences in student nurses perceptions based on their level of education in their nursing program.

Theoretical Framework: Socio-ecological model

Description of Sample: The cross sectional study had a convenience sample of students in pre-nursing and the clinical major in nursing (n=365). The students were classified as pre-nursing students or those in their first two years of the nursing program (n=153) and nursing students or third and fourth year students (n=212).

Setting: Participants were recruited from students in the nursing track at a College of Nursing in the Midwest of the United States. Using a survey, the participants rated their perceptions of children who are overweight.

Results: Student nurses in the clinical major displayed more negative perceptions of children who are overweight than pre-nursing students (t (363) = 5.773, p = 0.000). Nursing students were more likely to believe children who were overweight are lazy (χ²=20.56, p=0.000), had poor self-control (χ²=24.09, p=0.000), are unattractive (χ²=12.03, p=0.002), are slow (χ²=20.78, p=0.000), have no endurance (χ²=22.27, p=0.000), are inactive (χ²=31.1, p=0.000), overeat (χ²=23.74, p=0.000), are insecure (χ²=20.23, p=0.000), and have low self-esteem (χ²=24.44, p=0.000). However, there was no significant difference in how nursing students and pre-nursing students believed that overweight children are self-indulgent (p=0.064), like food (p=0.862), and are shapely (p=0.368).

Conclusions: Overall, results suggest that nursing students may form opinions during their pre-nursing and nursing program that are not influenced by current evidence. Differences were found between the students in the clinical nursing major and pre-nursing students responses, suggesting there were variances in their perceptions of children who are overweight. Additionally, the students in the nursing major reported more similarities in their negative perceptions of children who were overweight. Providing education on childhood obesity based on current evidence during nursing school would assist in addressing this issue.