Childhood Overweight Bias: Perceptions of Student Nurses within the Clinical Major

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Introduction

Background and Significance
- Overweight in children is a health concern in the United States
- Nurses can be instrumental in the prevention or management of overweight in children
- Nurses may have perceptions about childhood overweight that are not evidence based, which could influence their practice
- Ensuring nurses’ receive evidence-based information on overweight children in nursing school can help to prevent misperceptions when nurses’ begin their professional practice.

Purpose
- To explore student nurses in the clinical major’s perceptions of overweight children.

Method

Design
- Study is part of a larger research project
- Cross-sectional

Conceptual Framework
- Brofenbrenner’s Social-Ecological Model

Location
- Large Midwestern College of Nursing

Instruments
- Questionnaire
  - Fat Phobia Scale-The Short Form (Bacon, Scheltema, & Robinson, 2001)
  - 14 items, Likert Scale
  - Cronbach’s Alpha = 0.867

Data Analysis
- Independent Sample t-test
- Cross-tabulation

Findings

Sample (N = 212)
- Purposive sample; Student Nurses in the Clinical Major
- Academic level: Junior (n = 103); Senior (n = 109)

Students’ Gender
- Male: 20%
- Female: 80%

Junior and Senior nursing students reported similar negative perceptions of overweight children (t (211) = 1.566, p = 0.119).

Students’ Ethnicity
- Black/African American: 7%
- Latino or Hispanic: 3%
- White: 80%
- Asian: 5%
- Other: 5%

Students’ Perceptions of Physical Attributes of Children who are Overweight

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Junior</th>
<th>Senior</th>
<th>Significant Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lazy</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slow</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inactive</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unattractive</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Shapely</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>34%</td>
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Students’ Perceptions of Psychosocial Attributes of Children who are Overweight

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Junior</th>
<th>Senior</th>
<th>Significant Difference</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poor Self-Control</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Endurance</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Indulgent</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likes Food</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overeat</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insecure</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Self-Esteem</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>72%</td>
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Discussion

Implications for Nursing
- Findings suggest that student nurses in the clinical major, regardless of junior or senior academic level, report having negative perceptions about children who are overweight.
- It might be beneficial to ensure that student nurses receive evidence-based information about children who are overweight.

Further Research
- Examine students’ perception about overweight children following receipt of evidence based information on children who are overweight.
- Conduct a longitudinal study to identify the trends in student nurses’ perception about overweight children across academic levels.

Conclusion
- Responses indicated that the majority of students had perceptions of overweight children that are not evidence based.
- Senior and junior level nursing students had similar negative perceptions about children who are overweight.