

The Effect of Interpersonal Relationships on Eating Patterns and Physical Activity among Asian-American and European-American Adolescents

Authors : Jamil Lane, Jason Freeman

Abstract : Background: The role of interpersonal relationships is vital predictors of adolescents' eating habits, exercise activity, and health problems including obesity. The effect of interpersonal relationships (i.e. family, friends, and intimate partners) on individual health behaviors and development have gained considerable attention during the past 10 years. Teenagers eating habits and exercise activities are established through a dynamic course involving internal and external factors such as food preferences, body weight perception, and parental and peer influence. When conceptualizing one's interpersonal relationships, it is important to understand that how one relates to others is shaped by their culture. East-Asian culture has been characterized as collectivistic, which describes the significant role intergroup relationships play in their construction of the self. Cultures found in North America, on the other hand, can be characterized as individualistic, meaning that these cultures encourage individuals to prioritize their interest over the needs and want of their compatriots. Individuals from collectivistic cultures typically have stronger boundaries between in-group and out-group membership, whereas those from individualistic cultures see themselves as distinct and separate from strangers as well as family or friends. Objective: The purpose of this study is to examine the effect of collectivism and individualism on interpersonal relationships that shapes eating patterns and physical activity among Asian-American and European-American adolescents. Design/Methods: Analyses were based on data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, a nationally representative sample of adolescents in the United States who were surveyed from 1994 through 2008. This data will be used to examine interpersonal relationship factors that shape dietary intake and physical activity patterns within the Asian-American and European-American population in the United States. Factors relating to relationship strength, eating, and exercise behaviors were reported by participants in this first wave of data collection (1995). We plan to analyze our data using intragroup comparisons among those who identified as 'Asian-American' (n = 270) and 'White or European American' (n = 4,294) among the domains of positivity of peer influence and level of physical activity / healthy eating. Further, intergroup comparisons of these relationships will be made to extricate how the role positive peer influence in maintaining healthy eating and exercise habits differs with cultural variation. Results: We hypothesize that East-Asian participants with a higher degree of positivity in their peer and family relationships will experience a significantly greater rise in healthy eating and exercise behaviors than European-American participants with similar degrees of relationship positivity.

Keywords : interpersonal relationships, eating patterns, physical activity, adolescent health

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