

Body image perception and weight-related behaviour among adolescents of the Seychelles

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Background: We examined one's own body image perception and its association with reported weight-related behavior among adolescents of a rapidly developing country in the African region.

Methods: We conducted a school-based survey of 1432 students aged 11-17 years in the Seychelles. Weight and height were measured, and thinness, normal weight and overweight were assessed along standard criteria. A self-administered and anonymous questionnaire was administered. Perception of body image was assessed using both a closed-ended question (CEQ) and the Stunkard's pictorial silhouettes (SPS). Finally, a question assessed voluntary attempts to change weight.

Results: Overall, 14.1% of the students were thin, 63.9% were normal-weight, and 22.0% were overweight or obese. There was fair agreement between actual weight status and self-perceived body image based on either CEQ or SPS. However, a substantial proportion of the overweight students did not consider themselves as overweight (SPS: 24%, CEQ: 34%) and, inversely, a substantial proportion of the normal-weight students considered themselves as too thin (SPS: 29%, CEQ: 15%). Among the overweight students, an adequate attempt to lose weight was reported more often by boys and girls who perceived themselves as overweight vs. not overweight (72-88% vs. 40-71%, $p < 0.05$ for most comparisons). Among the normal-weight students, an inadequate attempt to gain weight was reported more often by boys and girls who perceived themselves as thin vs. not thin (27-68% vs. 11-19%, $p < 0.05$). Girls had leaner own body ideals than boys.

Conclusions: We found that substantial proportions of overweight students did not perceive themselves as overweight and/or did not want to lose weight and, inversely, that many normal-weight students perceived themselves as too thin and/or wanted to gain weight: this points to forces that can drive the upwards overweight trends. Appropriate perception of one's weight was associated with adequate weight-control behavior, although not strongly, emphasizing that appropriate weight perception is only one of several factors driving adequate weight-related behavior. These findings emphasize the need to address appropriate perception of one's own weight and adequate weight-related behavior in adolescents for both individual and community weight-related interventions.

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Photo: Flow cytometry study of expression of the B and T Lymphocyte Attenuator (BTLA) on human tumor specific CD8 T lymphocytes and effect of cancer vaccination provided by L. Derré et al., Division of Clinical Oncolmmunology, Ludwig Institute for Cancer Research, Lausanne branch, UNIL