The Associations Between Obesity, Income, and Race

Alexis Ray (airay@bgsu.edu)
Department of Sociology
Bowling Green State University

Significance

- Obesity has steadily increased over the past 50 years in United States.
- Obesity leads to other serious and fatal health problems including heart disease (The State of Obesity).
- Rates of obesity are lower for whites and higher for minorities. Whites tend to have higher incomes than minorities.

Background

- Whites experience obesity at a lower rate (37.9%) than do Black (46.8%) and Latinx people (47.0%) (Drewnowski 2009).
- Eating a healthy diet costs about $2,000 more a year than an unhealthy diet.

Hypotheses:
- Families with lower income will tend to be more obese than families with high income, no matter their race or ethnicity.
- White Families will tend to be less obese than families of color because of disadvantages in income.

Research Questions

- Is obesity positively associated with poverty?
- Does race moderate the association between obesity and income?

Dependent Measure

Perceived Obesity
How do you view yourself in terms of weight?
- slightly or very underweight (16.4%)
- about the right weight (52.1%)
- slightly or very overweight (31.5%)

Independent Measure

Family Income
About how much income, before taxes, did your family receive in 1994?

Data and Sample

- National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (Add Health)
- Public Use Data
- Wave 1
- N = 6490

Moderator Variable

Results

- Not a strong association between income and perceived obesity.
- Low-income youth were slightly more likely to perceive self as overweight.
- Relationship appears to vary by race and ethnicity.
- Whites more likely to perceive as overweight within lower income families.
- Black youth are more likely to perceive self as overweight within middle class families.

Summary and Conclusion

References