

Abstract

This study examined the psychological characteristics of obese Chinese adolescent girls as compared with their normal weight counterparts. A sample of 1155 secondary school girls aged between 11 and 19 completed a survey examining their history of weight-related teasing, body dissatisfaction, self-esteem, general psychological functioning and eating behaviour. A subgroup of 91 obese girls and 149 overweight girls were identified from the sample. Findings revealed that overweight girls were teased significantly more for their heaviness in the past and were less satisfied with their body appearance. They were not found to differ from average weight to underweight girls in self-esteem, depression, academic achievement, family and social relations. More disordered eating behaviours were found in the obese group. The structural model being tested confirmed the prediction that higher BMI was not a direct cause of poorer psychological functioning, but its effects were mediated by weight-related teasing and dissatisfaction with body appearance on self-esteem and depression. In addition, teasing history was found to contribute directly to negative mood. These findings helped us understand the psychological functioning of the group of adolescent girls who were significantly heavier than the others. Results were discussed in comparison with previous research, highlighting the limitations of present study and its implication for related research in the future.