The Impact of Worksite Weight-Related Social Norms on Associated Behaviors

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RESULTS

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OBJECTIVE AND RATIONALE

Objective: To assess the association between descriptive social norms for weight and weight-related behaviors and associated behaviors at the worksite

Background and Rationale:
• Obesity and weight gain clusters in social networks
• However, little is known about the psychosocial mechanisms by which this happens
• Social norms are defined as: “How the majority of individuals in a group think or behave; group standards and values for a particular behavior”
  • Descriptive social norms, defined as “perceptions of the occurrence or frequency of the health-related behavior in a population” may be of particular importance for obesity-related behaviors
• Few studies have examined the association of social norms with dietary and physical activity behaviors in adults
• No study has examined social norms for weight-loss specific behaviors
• Most adults under the age of 65 spend significant amounts of time at work. Thus, the worksite social norms can influence an individual’s behavior

METHODS

Design and Sample:
• Baseline data from site-randomized trial of a worksite ecological intervention for weight control
• 12 public high schools in central Massachusetts
• Sample of 844 employees enrolled (~ 2/3 of all employees)

Worksite Weight-Related Social Norms (WWSN) Survey:
Developed by study team to assess descriptive social norms at the worksite for weight loss behaviors, physical activity and eating. Asks respondents to rate “Most people I work with…..” on a 5 point scale. Psychometric testing using principal component analysis. Cronbach’s alpha of final scores were:
• Weight loss descriptive social norms (4 items): .78
• Physical activity descriptive social norms (10 items): .83
• Eating behavior descriptive social norms (7 items): .83

Behaviors:
Weight Loss Attempts: Single item re: whether currently trying to lose weight (yes/no)
Walking: Arizona Physical Activity Questionnaire sub-scale (MET hours per day)
Eating Behaviors: 26-item Eating Behaviors Inventory (EBI)
Co-variates: Age, gender, BMI diet and physical social support at the worksite

Analysis: Multivariate linear (walking and EBI) and logistic (weight loss attempts) regression models

LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Limitations: 1) Causality can’t be assessed; 2) Social desirability bias; 3) Limited generalizability

Conclusions:
• Associations of weight loss and eating social norms with behavior
• Unique from social support
• No association of physical activity social norms with physical activity
• May be little opportunity for and therefore little exposure to physical activity during the workday
• Results support the development of weight loss interventions that address social norms for weight loss and eating behaviors at work

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