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

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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 loss 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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