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

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The Impact of Worksite Weight-Related Social Norms on Associated Behaviors
Stephenie C. Lemon, Ph.D., Qin Liu, Ph.D., Robert Magner, MPH, Kristin L. Schneider, Ph.D., Lori Pbert, Ph.D.

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

RESULTS

**Study sample description**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>BMI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Teachers</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>24.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Multivariate logistic regression model: Association of weight loss social norms with weight loss attempt**

**Multivariate linear regression model: Association of physical activity norms with walking**

**Multivariate linear regression: Association of eating norms with the EBI**

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

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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