
NEWSLETTER

The Relation between Adolescents' Weight and Peer Effects in the Classroom Setting: An Empirical Analysis

By Du, S., Cheng, G., & Yu, W.

Correspondence to: Gang Cheng, Beijing Normal University, China. E-mail: cg@bnu.edu.cn

SINCE THE BEGINNING of the 21st century, obesity among adolescents has become an increasingly serious issue in China. It impedes the development of human capital of the individual, as well as threatening socioeconomic development by inducing exorbitant health expenditure. Among the many factors contributing to this issue is the school environment, particularly the classroom setting, and the basic building block of school education. This article is an investigation of the relationship between adolescents' weight and peer effects in the classroom setting, based on relevant data from the China Education Panel Survey.

Research findings show that:

- There existed significant peer effects in adolescent weight within a class. The average BMI and rates of overweight and obesity in peers were positively related to the weight of each individual teenager.
- The individual's perception of weight moderated peer effects in weight. Overestimating one's own weight remarkably diminished the peer effects, while underestimating it did not.

To positively leverage peer effects in adolescent weight, the study proposes suggestions as follows: (i) Increase investment in teenager health education to advance the action plan for health education of Chinese primary and secondary school students by improving tangible and soft environments for the school-based health education; (ii) Focus the content of health education on plural hazards of overweight and obesity and help students develop legitimate perception of weight, healthy conception of body image, and systematic knowledge about health management; (iii) Pay due regard to students' social experience while introducing the notion of BMI and ensure them a harmonious and friendly school climate in implementing the health education monitoring mechanism.

Source: Journal of East China Normal University, 2023; 41(12):85-99.