DO AFRICAN AMERICAN MOTHERS ACCURATELY ESTIMATE THEIR DAUGHTERS’ WEIGHT CATEGORY?

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INTRODUCTION

Addressing the disproportionate overweight and obesity burden among the African American population is a national public health priority. According to the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) 1999–2002, ≈23% of African American girls age 6–19 years are overweight, compared to 16% of all children in that age range.1 In Georgia the problem is even more serious; according to the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, 26% of Georgia high school students are overweight or at risk of becoming overweight (AROW), and 33% of Georgia middle school students are overweight or AROW.2 In children, AROW is defined as a body mass index (BMI) between the 85th and 94th percentile for age and sex, and overweight is defined as a BMI ≥95th percentile for age and sex.3 Overweight in childhood significantly increases the risk of co-morbid diseases, such as type 2 diabetes mellitus and hypertension, both as a child and as an adult.4 Although these alarming trends are documented and the dangers of obesity are known in the healthcare community, how African American women perceive their daughters’ weight is unclear.

The purpose of this pilot research study was to assess African American maternal estimation of an overweight daughter’s weight category. Specifically we aimed to: 1) determine if mothers of overweight daughters accurately perceive the daughters’ weight category (underestimate, accurate estimation, overestimate) and 2) determine if a physician diagnosis of overweight is associated with accurate maternal perception of a daughter’s weight.

METHODS

This was a cross-sectional pilot study of conveniently sampled African American women who were surveyed with the Morehouse School of Medicine Obesity Health Belief Survey. The survey consists of five sections that assess anthropometric measurements of the mother and child, demographics, medical conditions in mother and child, health belief about self (maternal), and maternal health beliefs about the daughter. To determine maternal perception of the daughter’s weight category, mothers were asked to respond to the question “I feel my child is…” with one of four possible responses: underweight, normal weight, a little overweight, or overweight. Mothers were also asked, “Has your child ever been told by a doctor that he/she is at-risk for overweight, overweight, or obese?” Mothers could answer either yes or no. The height and weight of the daughter were obtained by a nurse during triage, and the BMI percentile and weight category (underweight, normal weight, AROW, or overweight) was calculated.

Participants were enrolled in the study at the West End Medical Centers, Inc., a federally qualified health center in Atlanta, Georgia, from June 1, 2006, through July 31, 2006. Eligibility criteria for the mother were 1) self-identified as African American and born in the United States; 2) biological mother or legal female guardian for >1 year; 3) ≥18 years of age. The eligibility criterion for the daughter was that she had to be 2–17 years of age. Exclusion criteria were 1) mother or child with a diagnosis or disease that affects appetite or growth (such as hypothyroidism or Cushing syndrome); 2) pregnancy; or 3) mother or child on

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Key Words: Overweight, Health Beliefs, Perception of Health