


University of Wisconsin
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
AND PUBLIC HEALTH



Population
Health
Sciences

MATERNAL PSYCHOLOGICAL
DISTRESS AND DISORDERED
EATING AMONG US
MOTHERS

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Presenter Disclosures

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“No relationships to disclose”

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Presentation Objectives

- By the end of this session, the participants will be able to:
 - Describe the impact of maternal psychological distress on the nutritional practices of mothers in the US; and
 - Discuss the implications of these findings for mothers and their children.

Background

- Obesity is a growing epidemic in the US, raising weight loss to the national agenda.
- Unhealthy weight loss and control practices (i.e., skipping meals) are common.
 - ▣ more prevalent among women
- Women's nutrition and dietary practices are vital, daily personal behaviors

Significance

- Mothers experiencing psychological distress are more likely to engage in poor health behaviors.
- Mothers may be particularly susceptible to unhealthy weight loss strategies.
- Additional research is need to examine the impact of maternal psychological distress on weight loss strategies.

Aims

- The aims of the present study were to:
 - ▣ Examine the weight-loss strategies among mothers in the US.
 - ▣ Determine if and to what extent psychological distress was associated with unhealthy weight-loss behaviors among mothers.

Data

- Data were from the 1998 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS)
 - ▣ Oversampled underrepresented populations
 - ▣ Used a multistage stratified probability design to yield nationally representative estimates
- 1998 NHIS was used because such data do not exist in other recent national surveys.
- All results are based on weighted counts.

Sample

- All mothers
 - ▣ 7,184 (representative of 45.6 million mothers)
- Trying to lose or control weight
 - ▣ 4,151 (representative of 25.3 million mothers)

Key Independent Variable

- Assessed with a six-item scale of the *Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K6)*
- Responses were summed with higher scores indicating worse distress.
- Cutoff of ≥ 7 was used as an indicator of mild-moderate distress.

Key Dependent Variable

- Mothers reported on whether they were trying to lose weight and the behaviors used to control or lose weight.
- “Unhealthy weight loss/control” strategies were defined as:
 - ▣ skipping meals;
 - ▣ taking diet pills, laxatives, water pills, or diuretics;
 - ▣ vomiting; or
 - ▣ fasting for 24 hours or longer.

Control Variables

- | | |
|------------------|-------------------------------|
| □ Maternal | □ Family size and composition |
| ▣ Age | □ Poverty |
| ▣ Race/ethnicity | □ Urbanicity |
| ▣ Education | □ Region of the US |
| ▣ Acculturation | |
| ▣ BMI | |
| ▣ Smoking status | |

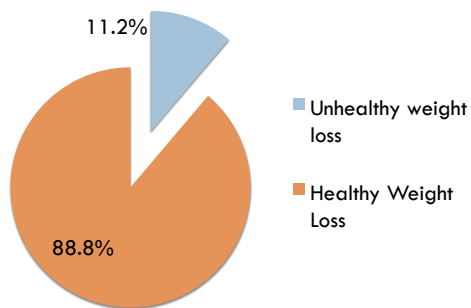
Analytic Approach

- Data were weighted to reflect complex sampling design
- χ^2 analyses
- Logistic regression models
 - ▣ Crude
 - ▣ Adjusted

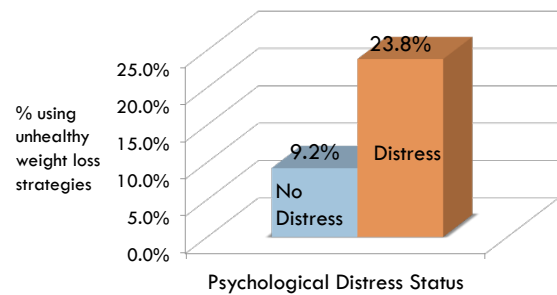
Descriptive results

- 41.3% of US mothers were trying to lose weight
- Weight loss status varied by maternal psychological distress
 - ▣ Mothers with psychological distress were more likely to be trying to lose weight (47.2% versus 40.4%)

Percentage of Mothers Using Unhealthy Weight Loss Strategies



Unhealthy Weight Loss, by Maternal Psychological Distress Status



Characteristics of Mothers Using Unhealthy Weight Loss Strategies

- More likely to
 - Be overweight or obese
 - Current smoker
 - Black (non-Hispanic)
 - Hispanic
 - Lower education level
 - Living in a single parent household
- Living in poverty
- Experiencing psychological distress
- Less likely to
 - Be living in the Northeastern part of the US

Unhealthy Weight Loss, by Maternal Psychological Distress Status*

| | Mothers Behavior to Lose or Control Weight | |
|--|---|--------------------|
| | Crude | Adjusted |
| | Odds of unhealthy weight-loss strategies (Skipping meals; taking diet pills, laxatives, water pills, or diuretics; vomiting; or fasting for 24 hours or longer) | |
| Maternal Psychological Distress (yes=1) | 3.06** (2.38-3.94) | 2.39** (1.84-3.10) |

*Controlling for covariates; **Statistically significant; p<0.05;

Conclusions

- Nearly one-quarter of US mothers with psychological distress are engaging in unhealthy and possibly dangerous weight loss or control strategies.
- Given that psychological distress was the strongest determinant of unhealthy weight loss, targeted efforts to identify, treat, and monitor maternal psychological distress is warranted.

Implications

- Maternal psychological distress coupled with unhealthy weight loss strategies are serious public health problems
 - Affecting the entire family
- Research is needed on the mechanisms through which psychological distress affects the dietary behaviors of mothers
 - This will help illuminate areas for clinical and public health interventions to promote healthy eating for the entire family.

Thank You!

□ For additional information, please contact:

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