MATERNAL PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AND DISORDERED EATING AMONG US MOTHERS

Contributors

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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.

Presenter Disclosures

Rada K. Dagher, PhD

“No relationships to disclose”
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
  - Age
  - Race/ethnicity
  - Education
  - Acculturation
  - BMI
  - Smoking status
- Family size and composition
- Poverty
- Urbanicity
- Region of the US
**Analytic Approach**

- Data were weighted to reflect complex sampling design
- \( \chi^2 \) 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%)

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**Percentage of Mothers Using Unhealthy Weight Loss Strategies**

- Unhealthy weight loss: 11.2%
- Healthy Weight Loss: 88.8%

**Unhealthy Weight Loss, by Maternal Psychological Distress Status**

- No Distress
  - % using unhealthy weight loss strategies: 9.2%
- Distress
  - % using unhealthy weight loss strategies: 23.8%
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

- Less likely to:
  - Be living in poverty
  - Experiencing psychological distress

Unhealthy Weight Loss, by Maternal Psychological Distress Status*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mothers Behavior to Lose or Control Weight</th>
<th>Odds of unhealthy weight-loss strategies (Skipping meals; taking diet pills, laxatives, water pills, or diuretics; vomiting; or fasting for 24 hours or longer)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maternal Psychological Distress (yes=1)</td>
<td>Crude = 3.06** (2.38-3.94)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*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!

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