Predictors of Unhealthy Weight Control Behavior Among High School Students

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Introduction: Adolescents often practice Unhealthy Weight Control Behaviors (UWCB) to lose weight or keep from gaining weight. UWCB include fasting, taking diet pills/powder, vomiting, and using laxatives. This study examined the risk factors of UWCB among high school students in the U.S.

Methods: The 2009 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) data were used to model the predictors of UWCB by multiple logistic regression with backward elimination. Possible factors were selected from the literature.

Results: Among 16,410 participants, nearly one of seven high school students (15%) engaged in UWCB. UWCB was associated with eight risk factors: currently trying to lose weight (vs. not trying) (OR=4.47, p<.001); being American Indian/Alaska Native (vs. all other ethnicity groups) (OR=2.75, p<.001); being at a normal weight but with body image distortion (BID) (vs. no BID) (OR=1.98, p<.001); eating the recommended amount of vegetables (vs. not eat recommended amount) (OR=1.93, p<.001); being female (vs. male) (OR=1.56, p<.001); being overweight (vs. normal weight) (OR=1.39, p<.001); not engaging in vigorous physical activity (vs. vigorous) (OR=1.16, p <.01); and being sedentary (vs. not sedentary) (OR=1.13, p<.05).

Conclusion: A moderate portion of high school students engaged in UWCB, and several demographic, psychological, and lifestyle factors were associated with UWCB. Design of intervention programs accounting for the aforementioned risk factors will help address the UWCB issues.