

Greater Parental Experiential Avoidance is Associated with Poorer Daily Health Habits in Youth

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Problem

Parental experiential avoidance (EA) refers to a parent's unwillingness or inability to engage in their children's problem events. Although parental EA has been examined in the context of children's anxiety symptoms, research is needed to understand how parental EA relates to children's health habits (e.g. fruit/vegetable consumption, physical activity). Families at high risk for obesity, such as low-income families, may be more likely to avoid addressing health habits. This study investigated the role of parental EA associated with health habits in youth and examined differences in income related to parental EA.

Methods

Parents of youth ages 7-17 were recruited via Amazon Mechanical Turk to complete an online survey examining risks for pediatric obesity. Parent-report questionnaires included: Parental Acceptance and Action Questionnaire (measure of EA; PAAQ), reported height and weight for parent and child, annual household income, and Healthy Habits Assessment total scores assessing daily health habits.

Results

After controlling for parent BMI, greater parental EA was associated with poorer health habits, explaining 4.4% additional variance in the model. Parents of youth whose income was below the median U.S. household income had greater parental EA than parents whose income was above the median. In the context of health habits, parents' inaction and unwillingness through EA may translate to a lack of limits set on daily sedentary behavior, limited encouragement for physical activity, and a lack of monitoring in healthy eating. Future research is needed to better understand how income disparities influence parental EA and related health habits.