Exploring College Calorie Consumption: A Sociological Analysis of Obesity Amongst NYC College Students

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Introduction

Research Question: How does socioeconomic status play a role in NYC college students’ growing rate of obesity?

In 2007-2008 almost 17% of children ages 2-19 were obese. Socioeconomic measures of income and education were studied to show where obesity is more or less present. Studies show that obesity is more present in the low-income population. Also, the likeness of obesity decreases when the household’s education increases. Obesity is usually defined as excess body fat that may cause a negative health effect leading to a reduced life or increased health problems. Obesity can lead to emotional, social, and health problems ranging from diabetes to cardiovascular risk factors such as high blood pressure and high cholesterol. [3]

How “Freshman 15” can be a gateway to obesity

Table 1 shows the major factors of weight gain. College students often switch from nutritional home-cooked meals to high-calorie content institutional food. Stress increase, sleep deprivation, and decrease of physical activity contributes to weight gain. [1]

- Since college freshmen experience increased freedom over their diets, alcohol consumption, and sleep patterns, this transitional year may be a critical period. [5]
- Studies show that female college freshmen are more likely to gain weight than male college freshmen. Weight, height, age, sex, race, and ethnicity are also factors taken into consideration when analyzing the growing rate of obesity. [4]

The Three “C”s:

How obesity can start in college

Cost: The efficiency of fast food allows for a quicker, more convenient access to food, without spending a lot of money.

Clock: Time management makes it difficult for a college student to prepare and purchase a healthy meal.

Career: Jobs that college students get during college make students more aware of the value of a dollar and influence them to budget their spending in order to invest in their career.

Sociological Perspectives

“Sociological Perspectives are sets of ideas and theories that sociologists use to understand problems in society.” [2] The research we examined could be best viewed through a functionalist perspective. In New York City, each person plays a role in society. In order to bring an end to the growing rate of obesity, health departments such as the USDA should change the prices of healthier foods. Lowering prices of foods that contain better nutrients and higher antioxidants could potentially promote better eating habits. Buying foods to consume or prepare a well-balanced meal is costly, and many college students cannot afford it with the food budgets they have.

Methods & Materials

As part of our analysis of obesity amongst college students, we would conduct a survey including the following four questions. This survey would be administered to our fellow student body at John Jay College.

1. What is your family’s average income?
2. How many times do you eat out while you attend school?
3. What is your weekly food budget?
4. Do you participate in any extracurricular activities? (Requiring physical activity)

This survey could help assess reasons for the growing rate of obesity. We may be able to find the root of the problem so that we, as a society, can lower the rate of obesity.

Chart & Table

Table 1: Major Factors Identified to Account for Weight Gain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weight loss</td>
<td>29.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caffeine food selection</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social eating</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irregular schedule</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General stress</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased activity</td>
<td>19.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of “healthy foods”</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social drinking</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References


