

Salud America!

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Research Network to Prevent Obesity Among Latino Children

RESEARCH BRIEF

December 2011

Voices of Latina Mothers and School Staff on Childhood Obesity

Introduction

Rates of childhood obesity are higher among some races and ethnicities. Nationally, 38.2 percent of Latino children ages 2 to 19 are overweight or obese, compared with 31.7 percent of all children those ages. Hispanic children ages 2 to 5 have higher obesity rates than their White counterparts (14.2% to 9.1%), the same is true for those ages 6 to 11 (25.1% to 19%).¹

Efforts to reduce obesity among Latino children have focused more on nutrition, but little has been done to address Latino children's physical activity levels. Over the past few decades, a number of social and environmental changes have limited children's access to safe places where they can walk, bike and play. For example, traffic dangers, urban sprawl and neighborhoods that lack sidewalks have contributed to a sharp decline in physical activity among children and adolescents.²

A microcosm of the national Latino childhood obesity problem is occurring in South Carolina. In addition to having one of the highest rates of overweight and obesity in the nation, the state also has one of the fastest-growing, youngest and lowest-income U.S. Latino populations.^{3,4} The rate for insufficient physical activity among South Carolina's youth is 10 percent higher than the national average, in which only 60.9 percent of Latino high school students meet national recommendations for regular physical activity.⁵ These statistics demonstrate the dire need for research and development of culturally-sensitive approaches to reduce obesity among Latinos in South Carolina. Overweight children are more likely to experience low self-esteem, suffer from depression, miss school, and develop chronic illnesses such as type 2

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PEER REVIEW

Peer review for this research brief was conducted by *Salud America!* National Advisory Committee Member Randy Schwartz, M.S.P.H., senior vice president for cancer control at the American Cancer Society, New England Division.

For more information about *Salud America!*, visit

www.salud-america.org

¹ Ogden CL, Carroll MD, Curtin LR, et al. "Prevalence of High Body Mass Index in US Children and Adolescents, 2007–2008." *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 303(3): 242–249, 2010.

² "Policy Statement on the Prevention of Pediatric Overweight and Obesity." Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003 Reaffirmed 2006. (No authors given.) Available at <http://aappolicy.aappublications.org/cgi/content/full/pediatrics;112/2/424>.

³ "Demographic Profile of Hispanics in South Carolina, 2008." Pew Hispanic Center, 2008, Available at <http://pewhispanic.org/states/?stateid=SC> (accessed January 2011).

⁴ Consortium for Latino Immigration Studies (CLIS). (2007). "The Economic and Social Implications of the Growing Latino Population in South Carolina." Columbia: The University of South Carolina.

⁵ Online report: "Moving South Carolina toward a Healthy Weight: Promoting Healthy Lifestyles and Healthy Communities," South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC), 2007, www.SCDHEC.gov/Health/chcdp/obesity (accessed January 20, 2009).



diabetes, heart disease and high cholesterol.⁶ Thus, it is critical that steps be taken to prevent obesity among our most vulnerable population—our children.

PRELIMINARY RESEARCH RESULTS

Our Salud America! pilot project, “Juntas Podemos (Together We Can): Empowering Latinas To Shape Policy To Prevent Childhood Obesity,” brought together public health researchers, community leaders and Latino families to study and develop effective policy recommendations regarding physical activity among Latino children from a growing immigrant settlement in West Columbia, South Carolina. Researchers utilized Photovoice to collect data from Latina mothers and interviewed community stakeholders. Recommendations regarding physical activity and nutrition among children will be developed in collaboration with Latina mothers from West Columbia, South Carolina. Photovoice is a community-based participatory research strategy that combines photography with grassroots action to identify health issues.^{7,8} In the initial phase of the project, mothers of Latino children used Photovoice to collect physical activity and nutrition data,^{9,10} and research staff conducting 11 interviews with school staff and community stakeholders. Preliminary findings include:

- **Main barriers to healthy eating and physical activity among Latino children include lack of infrastructure that supports walking and biking and unhealthy school lunches.** Initial results from Latina mothers’ Photovoice presentations show that lack of sidewalks and parks in their neighborhoods, lack of public transportation, unhealthy lunches served by schools, and unsafe neighborhoods make it difficult for many children to eat healthy and be active. Mothers also expressed lack of support from area police officers making it difficult for the Latino population to report speeding vehicles, which was another problem that prevented children from playing outside.
- **Community stakeholders and school staff agreed that lack of transportation, Spanish-speaking parents and the cost of out-of-school sports were the main barriers that keep Latino children from participating in organized sports.** Outside of these issues, there was little agreement among community stakeholders and school staff about barriers that prevent Latino children from getting enough

⁶ Online report: “Overweight and Obesity—Statistics.” American Heart Association, 2008. <http://www.americanheart.org/downloadable/heart/1197994908531FS16OVR08.pdf>. (accessed January 2008).

⁷ Wang, CC, Wu Kun Yi, Zhan Wen Tao, and Kathryn Carovano. “Photovoice as a Participatory Health Promotion Strategy.” *Health Promotion International*. 13(1), 75-86. 1998.

⁸ Wang, CC. and Yanique A. Redwood-Jones. “Photovoice Ethics: Perspectives from Flint Photovoice.” *Health Education Behavior*. 28(5), 560-572. 2001.

⁹ Wang et al. 1998.

¹⁰ Wang et al. 2001.

physical activity. For example, some mentioned that Latino children only like to play soccer and some noted that American children play more than Latino children.

Conclusion and Policy Implications

Our preliminary findings suggest that Latina mothers understand the variety of factors that impact their children's diets and levels of physical activity. School staff agreed with Latina mothers about several of the same main barriers that prevent Latino children in West Columbia, South Carolina, from being active, and also identified other factors. The barriers described in this brief demonstrate the need to develop policies that support healthy changes in our environments and schools. We are continuing to examine how Photovoice and interview data can help inform policy recommendations to help local decision-makers better address Latino childhood obesity in South Carolina.