

# April Allen, Nutrition & Hospitality Management and Dietetics

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## Childhood obesity and the socioeconomic status of Blacks, Hispanics, and Whites

*April Allen and Sara Gable*

Childhood obesity is affecting children from every social class, ethnic group, and demographic background. The prevalence of child obesity is highest among population groups with the least education and highest poverty rates (Drewnowski, 2004). The increase in childhood obesity is problematic because it is associated with type II diabetes, depression, social marginalization, and may reduce the adult life expectancy. The objective of this study was to examine the relationship between the prevalence of childhood obesity (BMI  $\geq$  95th percentile) and socioeconomic status in 8,708 5th graders. Subjects were participants in the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten Cohort. Children who were not in fifth grade and without height and weight data were excluded. Children were directly weighed and measured and categorized as not overweight ( $<$  95th percentile of BMI) or overweight ( $\geq$  95th percentile BMI). Six groups of children were identified; white-not overweight (n= 4815), white-overweight (n=1052), black-not overweight (n=711), black-overweight (n=274), Hispanic-not overweight (n=1342), and Hispanic-overweight (n=514). Socioeconomic status was based on parent reports of maternal education, occupation, family type, poverty status, household income, and the number of hours worked. Results indicated that black and Hispanic children were more likely to be obese than white children. Child race by overweight effects were found for maternal education, hours worked per week and household income, indicating differences in socioeconomic status among the groups. Additionally poverty status and family structure were significantly associated with child race and overweight status. Black and Hispanic overweight and not overweight children were more likely to live below poverty.

