

Key Facts in Rural Health

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Diet, Physical Activity, and Sedentary Behaviors as Risk Factors for Childhood Obesity: An Urban and Rural Comparison

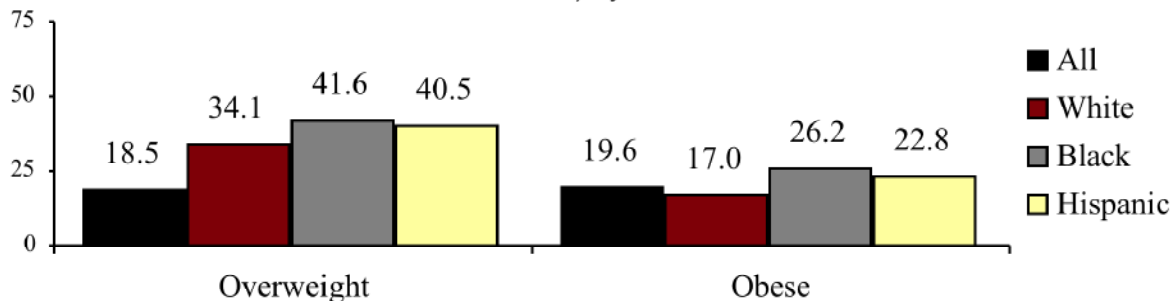
Rural children, paradoxically, are both more likely to be overweight or obese and more likely to be physically active than urban children. Our current study used diet and exercise information from the 1999-2006 National Health and Nutrition Examination Surveys to explore possible reasons for childhood obesity.

Key Findings

Prevalence of overweight and obesity is higher among rural children than urban children.

- Nearly a third (30%) of US children (2-19 years old) were overweight and 15.9% obese. Rural children were more likely to be overweight (36% vs. 30%) or obese (19% vs. 15%).
- Overweight and obesity were more common among minority children. Rural black children had the highest prevalence of overweight and obesity (See Chart, below).

Percent of US Rural Children Who Were Overweight or Obese (1999-2006) by Race



Diet and physical activity do not fully explain rural disparities.

- Among young children (ages 2 – 11 years), obesity and overweight remained more prevalent in rural children even when differences in diet and exercise were taken into consideration.
- Among adolescents (ages 12-19 years), rural disparities were no longer present after differences in diet and physical activity were held statistically equal. Specifically, low consumption of dietary fiber and high screen time (more than 2 hours of TV or computer time) were more common in rural adolescents and contributed strongly to obesity.

A full copy of the report can be obtained from the SC Rural Health Research Center at <http://rhr.sph.sc.edu>.