Obesity and Adolescent Girls’ Sexual Behaviors: Understanding the Influence of Peer and Romantic Relationships
Aletha Y. Akers, MD MPH FACOG

Childhood Obesity is a U.S. Epidemic

25,000,000 Children in the United States are Overweight or Obese

Effects of Childhood Obesity

On Physical Health
- Obesity among children and adolescents

On Social Lives
- Obese children bullied at school
- Less likely to be endorsed as a friend by peers
- Less likely to be called popular or cool
- Have more trouble making new friends

Complications of Childhood Obesity

Obese teens engage in more risky sexual behaviors than adults

Obese teens engage in more risky sexual behaviors than non-obese teens

Obese girls are more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviors than obese boys

Obese girls more likely to delay sexual initiation

Among sexually active girls, obese girls are more likely to:
- Start having sex earlier
- Have more casual sexual partners
- Have more partners
- Have older sexual partners
- Report using alcohol the last time they had sex
- Use condoms less

Why did we get funding from NIH?

Our Theory
- Obese teens have fewer chances to develop social skills and supportive social relationships, which negatively affects their romantic relationships.

Our Questions
- Are peer and romantic relationship skills delayed in obese girls?
- Are romantic relationships different for obese girls?
- Do adolescent peer and romantic relationship skills predict relationship experiences in adulthood?

What We’ve Learned
- Women in their 20’s to 30’s are equally satisfied in their romantic relationships except...
- Women obese since childhood are 2.9 times less satisfied in their romantic relationships.

What do we do about this problem?

Link between obesity and sexual behaviors = Tip of the iceberg!

Media stigmatization of obese children
- Stop promoting unrealistic and unhealthy beauty norms.
- Celebrate the beauty of real women’s bodies.
- Ensure adolescent access to comprehensive sex education & highly effective contraception.

Food policies that are obesogenic
- Mass media marketing of obesogenic food to kids
- Urban planning policies that limit physical activity
- Sex education programs that promote abstinence only

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