

Exploring a theory of change: Are increases in parental empowerment associated with healthier weight-related parenting practices?

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Aim

To examine whether increasing parental empowerment – i.e., helping parents realize control over their life situation and act to promote a healthier lifestyle – is associated with the adoption of parenting practices that support healthy weight.

Methods

Setting: 16 Greater Boston Head Start programs.

Design: Difference-in-difference design with longitudinal data collected across four consecutive academic semesters (fall & spring, 2017-2019).

Sample: Head Start parents (n=636).

Exposure measure: Parental Empowerment through Awareness, Relationships, and Resources (PEARR) survey [2].

Outcome measure: Obesity Parenting for Intervention (OPTION) survey [3].

Results

Table 1. Characteristics of the study sample (n=636 Head Start parents).

- **54.9%** report being a **single parent** in their household.
- **39.6%** identify as **Hispanic/Latino** and **30%** as **Black or African American**.
- **28.6%** specify **English** as their **primary language**.
- **22.5%** report being **unemployed**.

Head Start serves a linguistically, racially, and ethnically diverse population of parents.

Table 2. Estimated association between changes in empowerment and healthy weight parenting scores.

	Estimate (SE)	95% CI	p - value
Model 1	0.149 (0.031)	0.089, 0.209	<0.0001***
Model 2	0.153 (0.032)	0.090, 0.217	<0.0001***

Model 1: Unadjusted & unweighted.
Model 2: Adjusted for key confounders (number of adults in the household, parent race/ethnicity, and level of English proficiency) & inverse probability weights applied to account for selection bias.

After adjustment for key confounders, a one-unit increase in empowerment was associated with a mean 0.153-unit increase in parenting score (Model 2).

Increases in parental empowerment were associated with the adoption of healthier weight-related parenting practices.

Implications

- Parental empowerment is predictive of healthy weight parenting in a large sample of diverse parents with low income.
- Parental empowerment may be an important target in interventions for the prevention of obesity in young children of low-income households.
- Interventionists should consider empowerment constructs in the context of curriculum design.

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References

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