

Overweight kids experience more loneliness, anxiety, study finds

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A new University of Missouri study has found that overweight children, especially girls, show signs of the negative consequences of overweight as early as kindergarten. Credit: parenting.ivillage.com

(PhysOrg.com) -- As childhood obesity rates continue to increase, experts agree that more information is needed about the implications of being overweight as a step toward reversing current trends. Now, a new University of Missouri study has found that overweight children, especially girls, show signs of the negative consequences of being overweight as early as kindergarten.

"We found that both boys and girls who were overweight from kindergarten through third grade displayed more depression, anxiety and loneliness than kids who were never overweight, and those negative feelings worsened over time," said Sara Gable, associate professor of

human development and family studies in the MU College of Human Environmental Sciences. "Overweight is widely considered a stigmatizing condition and overweight individuals are typically blamed for their situation. The experience of being stigmatized often leads to [negative feelings](#), even in children."

MU researchers used the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K) to examine the social and behavioral development of 8,000 school-age children from kindergarten entry through third grade. The researchers evaluated factors that have not been studied previously: age at becoming overweight and length of time being overweight.

"Girls who were consistently overweight, from kindergarten through third grade, and girls who were approaching being overweight were viewed less favorably than girls who were never overweight," said Gable, an MU State Extension Specialist. "Teachers reported that these girls had less positive social relations and displayed less self-control and more acting out than never-overweight girls."

The results indicate that larger than average children, especially girls, experience social and behavioral challenges before they reach the 95th percentile of the Body Mass Index and are classified as being overweight. More research is needed to develop alternative approaches for categorizing children's weight and creating effective intervention programs, Gable said.

"Most appearance-based social pressure likely originates in the eye of the beholder," Gable said. "Therefore, intervention and prevention efforts should be designed for everyone. All kids should learn what constitutes a healthy weight and healthy lifestyle."

MU researchers will continue to use the ECLS-K to study the

implications of being overweight for children's development. The study, "Implications of Overweight Onset and Persistence for Social and Behavioral Development between Kindergarten Entry and Third Grade," was published in *Applied Developmental Science*, and was funded by the United States Department of Agriculture, Food Assistance and Nutrition Research Programs.

Source: University of Missouri-Columbia ([news](#) : [web](#))

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