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Relationship of eating competence to food and eating behaviors in a predominantly Hispanic sample of 4th grade parents is confirmed in a predominantly non-Hispanic white sample of 4th grade parents.

Purpose: Eating competence (EC) was associated with parent practices supportive of child obesity prevention in a mostly Hispanic sample. This study sought to confirm findings in a mostly non-Hispanic white sample.

Methods: Data were collected at baseline from 2 cohorts of parents in consecutive years whose 4th grade children participated in a classroom-based cooking program. Parents (n=215) responded to an online survey that included the Satter Eating Competence Inventory 2.0 (ecSI 2.0), fruit and vegetable-based modeling practices, self-efficacy/outcome expectancy (SE/OE) and fruit/vegetable availability (FVA] in the home; height/weight were self-reported. Survey response options were summed for analyses that included correlation, means testing, and cluster analysis.

Results: Parents were mostly non-Hispanic white (91%), female (87%), college educated (66%), with a mean age of 39.6 ± 5.9 y; only 18% were obese. 54% were eating competent (EC) (ecSI 2.0 score ≥ 32); mean ecSI 2.0 score of 31.8 ± 8.0 did not differ by gender. Past or current nutrition assistance program use was 17% SNAP, 21% WIC, 15% food banks. Although healthy, 20% self-identified as under extreme stress and 50% had either used a nutrition assistance program or worried about money for food. EC parents had greater FVA (12.3 ± 2.5 vs 11.5 ± 2.8 , $P=0.04$). SE/OE was significantly higher in EC parents (55.0 ± 6.5 vs 52.3 ± 8.4 , $P=0.013$). EC parents more strongly agreed that they could buy and serve vegetables that their child would eat (all $P < 0.04$). Parent modeling of obesity preventive eating behaviors was significantly greater in EC than non-EC parents ($P < 0.001$). EC parents were more likely to eat dinner and include vegetables with meals (all $P < 0.03$). Cluster analysis identified 2 clusters—Achievers (n=155) and Strivers (n=53). Achievers demonstrated greater food resource management skills (e.g., planning meals, comparing prices, money management confidence, considering nutrition in purchases; all $P \leq 0.03$). Achiever ecSI 2.0 scores were significantly higher (33.2 ± 7.1 vs 27.8 ± 8.5 ; $P < 0.001$).

Conclusions: Association of EC with obesity preventive food related practices in both Hispanic and non-Hispanic white parents endorses parent nutrition education focused on EC concepts.