

DISCRIMINATION AGAINST THE OBESE AND VERY THIN STUDENTS IN BRAZILIAN SCHOOLS

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PeNSE 2012 is a survey conducted by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), in partnership with the Ministry of Health. PeNSE covers a broad range of subjects, especially risk behavior. This article has the aim of analyzing discrimination against obese and very thin students using PeNSE microdata.

Descriptive statistics indicate that “very fat” boys and girls have overall worse indicators for most of the risk behavior and other variables analyzed. Several figures are worse for the “very thin” than for the “fat” students. Comparing girls and boys, there are lower percentages of active bullies, fighters, injured and physically active, lower consumption of illicit drugs and formulas to lose or gain weight, higher levels of frequent lonely and sedentary female students. Insomnia percentages are also higher for the girls. “Very thin” girls are more prone to being victims of bullying than their “fat” peers, while the opposite occurs for the male students.

Figures for public and private schools have very similar patterns. Occurrence of bullying is slightly higher in private schools and the prevalence of sedentary students is lower. Percentages of students vomit inducing or using laxatives, and consuming cigarettes are higher in public schools. Figures also suggest that “very fat” students are food conscious, and, at least in terms of frequency (not necessarily in quantities), show an effort to have a healthier diet than their peers.

These statistics suggest the occurrence of a complex and recursive phenomenon, where students that have a less harmonious relationship with their parents have lower self-esteem and also more problems with their peers. It also can be noticed that the consumption of illegal drugs present relatively low figures, while the use of drugs to gain or lose weight, laxatives or vomit inducing can much higher proportions among “very thin” and “very fat” students.

Econometric model shows that non “normal” students have a greater chance of suffering FB than “normal” pupils. Male students have greater chance of being frequently discriminated when compared to the female ones. There is no statistical difference between public and private schools. Black, yellow and Indian students have greater chance of suffering FB than white pupils. Students whose mothers didn’t study have greater chance of suffering FB than those whose mothers have completed high school education.

Several public policy concerns arise from the results. First, discrimination based on body image should be included in the radar of both the Ministries of Health and Education. Second, the use of drugs, formulas and other products to lose or gain weight, laxatives and vomit inducing should be considered as object of public health policies. Third, public campaigns should be promoted to diminish discrimination. However, these campaigns and also those devoted to promote healthier eating and physical exercise should be tested to prevent stigmatization of obese and very thin individuals. Fourth, practice of physical exercise should be further promoted among students, especially the female ones.

SUMÁRIO EXECUTIVO

TEXTO PARA DISCUSSÃO

