Influence of the immigrant status of the mother on the child’s body image and weight

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Ethnic differences in nutritional status prevalence were reported in literature.

Possible explanations:

- Diet and exercise habits
- Genetic characteristics
- Body image perceptions and ideal body images.

The differences among ethnic groups in how they see their bodies (perceptual body image) and in how they feel about their bodies (attitudinal body image) may affect how they respond to weight changes and weight control.
In addition to differences in genetic patterns, lifestyle food choice and consumption,

Ethnicity can influence the degree of body image satisfaction. Therefore different ideals of beauty can involve different desire to be more or less thin.
Body image: the picture of our own body which we form in our mind.

Body Mass Index: a reliable indicator of body fatness of our own body.

Our research was conducted on a children sample.
Eating disorders and weight status of children

their parents

mothers
How much do all the outlined issues affect the body image perception and nutritional status of children of immigrant women?
OUR STUDY

Comparisons between Italian and first-generation immigrant children and their mothers in order to test children nutritional status and body image perception, according to the following traits:

✓ Children:
  - BMI
  - Body image perception and dissatisfaction;

✓ Children mothers:
  - Body image perception for their children and dissatisfaction
2706 children aged 8–9 yrs attending Emilia-Romagna schools (2005)

12% Children of: Italian mother

88% Children of: Immigrant mother
2706 children aged 8–9 yrs attending Emilia-Romagna schools (2005) + their mothers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mother from</th>
<th>Italy</th>
<th>Other countries</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>1239</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>1405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>1146</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>1301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2385</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>2706</td>
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METHODS

ANTHROPOMETRIC SURVEY

- Weight (kg)
- Height (cm)
- BMI (kg/m²)

Nutritional status:
- Underweight;
- Normal weight;
- Overweight;
- Obese.

(cut-off by Cole et al., 2000 e 2007)
METHODS

ASSESSMENT OF BODY IMAGE PERCEPTION

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Collins (1991)
FIGURE SELECTION

• Child:
  - Actual figure
  - Ideal figure
  - Body image dissatisfaction (Feel minus Ideal Discrepancy - F.I.D.) = actual figure - ideal figure,

FID Index:
- 0 (actual f. = ideal f.)
- Positive score (actual f. > ideal f.)
- Negative score (actual f. < ideal f.)
Mother:
- Actual figure of her child;
- Ideal figure of her child
- Body image dissatisfaction (F.I.D.) = actual figure - ideal figure of her child,

FID Index:
- 0 (actual f.= ideal f.)
- Positive score (actual f.> ideal f.)
- Negative score (actual f.< ideal f.)
perception in overweight children

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(Gualdi-Russo et al., 2007)
Children of Italian mothers had a greater BMI than children of immigrant mothers.
Sons of immigrant mothers show higher frequencies of underweight.
Daughters of immigrant mothers show a lower prevalence of overweight and obesity.
Daughters of Italian mothers

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<th>FREQ.%</th>
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Daughters of immigrant mothers

This choice was consistent with their lower values of BMI in comparison to the daughters of Italian mothers.
Sons of Italian mothers

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<td>F.2</td>
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<td>3.2</td>
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This choice was no consistent with their lower values of BMI in comparison to the sons of Italian mothers.
All male and female children showed a preference for a thinner body.
An overlap between actual and ideal figures of children is generally observed in mothers.
BMI vs Body Image

Inadequate or wrong perception in underweight children

This frequency was particularly high in sons of immigrant mothers.
BMI vs Body Image

Inadequate or wrong perception in overweight/obese children

This frequency was higher in children of Italian mothers than in those of immigrant mothers.
Conclusions

This study involved qualitative and quantitative approaches to outline the role of mother’s origin on child’s body image and weight.

- Italian children show higher values of BMI than children with immigrant mothers.
- Italian children want to be thinner and are more dissatisfied with their bodies than children with immigrant mothers.
- The misperception of body image shows a frequency of three times more in underweight boys with immigrant mothers than in those with Italian mothers.
- The misperception of body image of overweight children with Italian mothers is greater than children with immigrant mothers.
Conclusions

This study involved qualitative and quantitative approaches to outline the role of mother's origin on child's body image and weight.

- A majority of mothers are satisfied with their child body image.
- Italian mothers want their daughters be a little thinner than they are.
- Immigrant mothers want their sons be a little thicker than they are.
The differences found between the two sub-samples of children having Italian or immigrant mothers, and their mothers, may be related to socio-cultural and behavioral influences linked to ethnic origin.

There is a need to monitor and control nutrition, BMI, body image perception and body image satisfaction in children of Italian mothers, especially those in BMI categories of overweight and obesity, and in children of immigrant mothers in the extreme BMI categories of obesity and underweight.
Body image perception and anthropometric assessment of nutritional status could play an important role in future programs of nutritional surveillance as they provide indications of dissatisfaction, body image disturbances and of possible trends in children of different ethnic origin.