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Social Networks of Treatment-seeking Overweight and Obese Children

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Parents and peers significantly impact children’s eating and activity patterns, as well as their perceptions about body image and weight. However, little is known about the role of parental and peer influences among treatment-seeking overweight and obese youth. The present study focuses on 1) synthesizing the literature on parental and peer effects of overweight youth, 2) characterizing the networks of treatment-seeking overweight children (e.g., network size, type of relationships including parents and peers), 3) assessing associations between network variables and demographic factors (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity), and 4) evaluating the associations between network variables and baseline degree of overweight. We are currently conducting a trial of family-based treatment for childhood obesity, and have collected baseline data of treatment-seeking children (N=241), including social network variables (via structured interview), demographic variables (via questionnaire), and degree of overweight (via weight and height calculations). Results of the literature review as well as analyses of the role of social network variables will be presented. Findings have the potential to identify risk and resilience factors related to parental and peer influence that are associated with children’s degree of overweight.