

Being overweight not such a stigma for African American women

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While all obese women are less satisfied with the weight-related quality of their lives than women of 'normal' weight, black women report a higher quality of life than white women of the same weight. In addition, black women appear to be more concerned about the physical limitations resulting from their obesity, than by the potential psychological consequences of being overweight or obese. These findings by Dr. Tiffany L. Cox, and her team from the University of Alabama at Birmingham, the Neuropsychiatric Research Institute in Fargo, ND, and Obesity and Quality of Life Consulting in Durham, NC, are published online in Springer's journal *Applied Research in Quality of Life*.

It is well accepted that obesity does not only increase the risk of subsequent disease, disability and [premature death](#), it also impacts the quality of life of [obese individuals](#). In the United States, approximately 80 percent of black women over the age of 20 are overweight or obese (BMI* equal to or greater than 25).

Cox and colleagues examined the link between BMI and weight-related quality of life in a high-risk sample of [obese women](#) (172 black and 171 white) using data collected between 2000 and 2010. An obesity-specific quality of life questionnaire was used to examine five areas: physical function, self-esteem, sexual life, public distress and work.

The researchers found that for all women, as BMI rose, quality of life fell. However, there were notable differences in weight-related quality of life between black and white women. At similar BMIs, black women

consistently scored higher on quality of life measures than white women, with self-esteem being particularly higher among black women.

The authors suggest that the relationship between weight and quality of life in black women may be partially explained by body image and [social norms](#). Because black women are typically more accepting of larger body sizes, there may be less reporting of impaired quality of life in this group.

Dr. Cox comments: "The implications of this relationship between weight and quality of life in black women remain unclear. While the highest quality of life is desirable as an indicator of overall well-being, black women's perception of experiencing a high quality of life despite having a high BMI may also dampen motivation for attempting weight loss. Additional research is needed to understand the potentially bidirectional relationship between weight and quality of life in [black women](#)."

More information: Cox TL et al (2011). Examining the association between body mass index and weight related quality of life in black and white women. *Applied Research in Quality of Life*. [DOI 10.1007/s11482-011-9160-8](#)

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