

Body Concerns and Weight Management Behaviors in Students Who Identify as a Sexual or Gender Minority

Marissa Luciano, BS and Jesse Stable Morrell, PhD
Department of Agriculture, Nutrition, and Food Systems



University of
New Hampshire
College of Life Sciences
and Agriculture

Background

- In 2016, 4.1% of the population identified as a sexual or gender minority (SGM).¹
- SGM individuals experience greater health disparities, disordered eating, low confidence, and higher weight.^{2,3}
 - Motives for thinness or muscularity can cause extreme diet & exercise, use of weight loss pills or laxatives, skipping meals, or nutrient deficient diets.^{3,4}
 - Eating disorders (ED) have the highest mortality rate of all mental health disorders.³
 - 75% of SGM youth were diagnosed/suspected of having an ED and over half diagnosed considered suicide.⁵
 - Body image can contribute to depression, anxiety, suicide, substance abuse, disordered eating, eating disorders.⁶

Objective

To assess prevalence of body concerns and weight management behaviors in students 18-24 years old who identify as a sexual or gender minority (SGM) compared to students who do not identify as either (non-SGM).

Methods

- Data were collected from students 18-24 years old (n=2642) who participated in the College Health and Nutrition Assessment Survey (CHANAS), an ongoing, cross-sectional study at a midsize, northeastern university between 2015-2020 (UNH IRB #5524).
- Sexual and gender identity, perceived weight, and weight management behaviors were collected from an online survey (Qualtrics).
- Body concern prevalence was indicated as those who are actively trying to change weight or perceive their weight as overweight or underweight.
- Body mass index (BMI) calculated from height & weight
- Chi-square analysis for group difference (SPSS, P<0.05).

Acknowledgements

Funding: NH Agriculture Experiment Station & USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture Hatch Project 1010738

Participant Characteristics

		Non-Sexual or Gender Minority (n=2540)	Sexual or Gender Minority (n=102)
Age: n (%)	18-20	2268 (89.3)	83 (81.4)
	21-24	272 (10.7)	19 (18.7)
Sex: n (%)	Male	912 (35.9)	20 (19.6)
	Female	1628 (64.1)	76 (74.5)
	Transgender	0 (0)	6 (5.9)
Sexual Orientation: n (%)	Heterosexual	2540 (100)	2 (2)
	Gay/ Lesbian/ Bisexual/ Other	0 (0)	100 (98)
Race: n (%)	White	2282 (93.6)	91 (93.8)
	Black/ Asian/ American Indian/ Multirace/ Other	157 (6.5)	6 (6.2)
Ethnicity: n (%)	Non-Hispanic or Latino	2458 (96.8)	89 (87.3)
	Hispanic or Latino	78 (2.8)	12 (11.8)
BMI: n (%)	Underweight (<18.5 kg/m ²)	92 (3.8)	5 (5.1)
	Within Normal Limits (<18.5-24.99 kg/m ²)	1725 (70.4)	57 (58.2)
	Overweight (25-29.99 kg/m ²)	490 (20)	21 (21.4)
	Obese (>30 kg/m ²)	144 (5.9)	15 (15.3)

Results

- 3.9% (n=102) of students identified as an SGM.
- Obesity was higher among SGM students vs. non-SGM students (15.3% vs 5.9%; P <0.001).
- There were significantly more SGM students who perceive their weight as being over/underweight compared to non-SGM students (53.5% vs 35.1%; P<0.001).
- There were no differences between SGM students and non-SGM students in reported rates of those trying to gain or lose weight (61.0% vs 66.2%; P=.28).

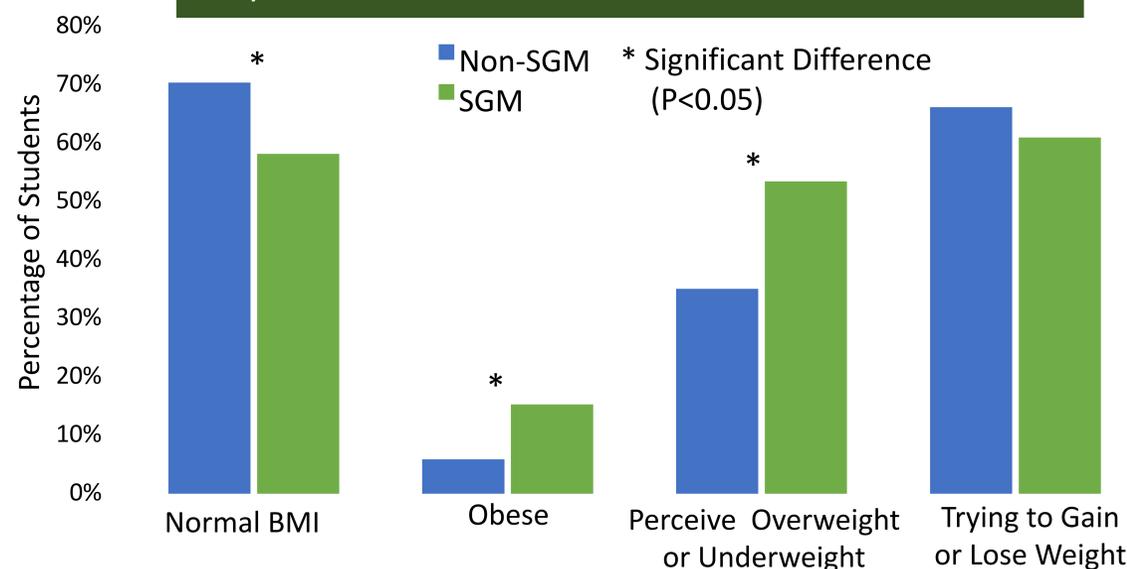
Conclusion

- **SGM students experience higher rates of body concerns and were more likely to be obese.**
- **Despite most students being at a normal BMI, 2/3 of students were actively trying to gain or lose weight.**
- Findings may assist college educators in promoting body acceptance and body positivity among both SGM students and non-SGM students.
- Healthful weight management or non-weight approaches could be prioritized in health education

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Body Concerns Within Non-SGM Students vs SGM Students



Contact:

Marissa Luciano
msl1017@wildcats.unh.edu