



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Perception of Childhood Obesity in Mothers of Preschool Children

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Abstract

Objectives: The purpose of this study was to identify the perception of childhood obesity in mothers of preschool children using Q methodology.

Methods: A total of 38 Q statements about childhood obesity were obtained from 41 participants. The QUANL PC program was used to analyze the results.

Results: There were three types of perception toward obesity in mothers of preschool children: the “authoritative discipline type,” the “generous home meal focused type,” and the “home meal based on household financial situation type.”

Conclusion: The perception of mothers toward childhood obesity can affect the extent of maternal interaction with children or meal preparation for the family. Based on these results, it is necessary to plan specific programs according to the types of maternal perception toward childhood obesity.

1. Introduction

Childhood obesity is a problem in both developed and developing countries. Preschool children are at risk of developing several nutritional disorders. The most common problem is obesity, which is becoming increasingly prevalent in children aged 3–5 years [1]. The reported rate of preschool obesity varies among countries. It has increased from 4.2% in 1990 to 6.7% in 2010 [2], indicating a rate of increase of approximately 63%. Currently, 40–50 million children are classified as

overweight or obese [3]. Efforts to reduce obesity, such as intervention for childhood obesity, are not aggressive enough, even though the prevalence rate of obesity is exponential. It was predicted that the population of obesity would increase continuously [4].

In Korea, it was reported that the high influence of Western-style meals and lack of physical activities have caused 3–5-year-old preschoolers to become obese at a rate of 6.4% [5]. Childhood obesity is a public health problem that has to be dealt with, because it can be a starting point of chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular

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disease, hypertension, diabetes mellitus, cancer, asthma, liver disease, and joint disease, both in childhood and adulthood [6].

Healthy habits and concrete perception of health start to form during the preschool period, which can be highly influenced by culture including family, nurturing environments, and public policies [7]. In addition, it is important to have early-stage intervention and obesity prevention during preschool stage compared to the other stages of life as preschoolers tend to gain more weight rather than grow in height. During the preschool period, the number of adipose cell tissue could increase rapidly, which can easily lead to obesity. Obesity developed during this stage can progress through adolescence and adulthood as well [8].

Weight is a phenomenon that can be affected by one's sociocultural background [9]. Thus, mothers' perception toward the weight of children is important in terms of obesity management. In many countries, there are systemic studies on toddlers [10] or infants [11] in each developing stage with increased awareness to meet the requirements for obesity management. However, in Korea, few studies have focused on obesity and influencing factors of preschoolers, although numerous studies have been conducted on obesity among those who are older than school-age children [12,13].

Q methodology is a research method that redeems the weaknesses of quantitative and qualitative studies, which makes it possible to stereotype the awareness among participants. At the same time, it specifically allows participants to express subjective responses through an objective process. Therefore, this method can be used for the subjective perception of people with specific classes or for applying logical methods to investigate a social phenomenon [14]. Thus, this study uses Q methodology to identify mothers' perceptions of obesity in preschoolers. Through this method, the study outlined the characteristics of the different types of maternal perception of obesity in preschoolers.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Design

This study was an exploratory research that identified the types of maternal perception of obesity in their preschoolers and described the characteristics of each type of perception by applying the Q methodology (Table 1).

2.2. Participants

The study participants included 41 mothers with preschoolers aged between 3 years and 5 years. Preschoolers underwent normal development stage without experiencing any chronic disease, malformation, or health problems at birth. Participants were aged between 27 years and 43 years with a body mass index of 15.8–26.34.

2.3. Procedure

2.3.1. Q population

In this study, three ways were used to construct the Q population. First, the literature was reviewed and salient statements were identified. Second, parents with preschool aged children were asked to write down statements that generally represented the characteristics of childhood obesity. These statements were systematically organized as sentences. From both the literature and statements from parents with preschool aged children, a total of 117 sentences were collected as the Q population. The 117 sentences were reviewed by a nutritionist, two pediatricians who majored in childhood obesity, and two laypersons who were interested in childhood obesity. A final group of 38 Q statements were identified as being distinctive and representative of childhood obesity.

2.3.2. P sampling

One of the most salient characteristics of Q methodology is that it is possible to use a small participant sample because intraindividual differences are considered significant. The participants in this study were 41 mothers who had preschool children.

2.3.3. Q sorting

The study participants were informed that the purpose of this study was to identify their perceptions about childhood obesity. It was stressed that there was no wrong or right answer, and that their opinions were valued as correct. They were first asked to read through the statements to become familiar with the range of opinions that they needed to consider. Participants were asked to rank-order the Q sample statements into levels of personal agreement or disagreement. The statements were sorted into a matrix ranging from -4 (strong disagreement) to $+4$ (strong agreement). Following card sorting, the participants were asked to give reasons for their particular ranking. A scoring of $+4$ or -4 was recorded depending on the reasons cited for the given choice.

2.4. Ethical issue

This study received institution ethics approval from the Kyungnam University Committee (No: 1040460-A-2014-009). Information on the study was placed on a parent notice board to recruit participants. Mothers who were interested in this study were given a brief verbal explanation of the research. They were given a copy of the consent form. They were also told about the voluntary nature of their participation and their right not to be involved or to withdraw from participation at a later stage. Mothers were offered a washing preparation for kitchens for their participation.

2.5. Data analysis

What differentiates Q methodology from other qualitative methods is the transformation of qualitative

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