



Permissive flexibility in successful lifelong weight management: A qualitative study among Finnish men and women



Anu Joki ^{a,*}, Johanna Mäkelä ^b, Mikael Fogelholm ^a

^a Department of Food and Environmental Sciences, University of Helsinki, P.O. Box 66, Building: 2029, Helsingin Yliopisto, Finland

^b Department of Teacher Education, University of Helsinki, P.O. Box 8, Building: 312, Helsingin Yliopisto, Finland

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 21 December 2016

Received in revised form

22 March 2017

Accepted 26 April 2017

Available online 27 April 2017

Keywords:

Successful weight management

Normal weight

Flexibility

Qualitative research

ABSTRACT

Maintaining normal weight in the current obesogenic environment is a challenge. However, some people can do it. More insight is needed to understand how and why some people succeed in long-term weight maintenance. This study uses a rare, qualitative approach by describing the thoughts of successful weight management and self-perceived requirements for success in weight maintenance. We interviewed 39 individuals who have maintained normal weight for their entire lives (men and women). The content analysis revealed a main theme: flexible, permissive and conscious self-regulation, which was divided into two subthemes (eating-related behavior and weight-related behavior). The informants reported certain routines that supported their weight management: regular eating, sufficient meal sizes, eating in response to hunger, healthy and vegetable-rich diet along with moderate feasting and flexible eating restriction. Flexibility in routines allowed freedom in their eating behavior. In addition, informants regarded themselves as physically active, and they enjoyed regular exercise. Regular weighing was generally considered unnecessary. Normal weight was regarded as a valuable and worthwhile issue, and most of the informants worked to keep their weight stable. Although the perceived workload varied among informants, the weight management strategies were similar. It was crucial to be conscious of the balance between eating and energy consumption. Further, flexibility characterized their behavior and was the basis of successful weight management. Women were more aware of weight control practices and knowledge than men, but otherwise, women and men reported similar weight management methods and attitudes. In conclusion, the interviewees who have maintained the normal weight had created a personal weight-management support environment where weight management was a lifestyle.

© 2017 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Drastic changes in lifestyle over the past 30 years have increased the prevalence of obesity in all parts of the world (World Health Organization, 2016). Obesity represents a growing public health problem predisposing individuals to various diseases. The treatment of obesity is typically separated into two periods: Losing weight is the first and perhaps easier part, whereas weight management after weight loss (prevention of weight regain) is challenging (Elfhag & Rossner, 2005).

The definition of weight management varies. Typically, definitions determine successful weight management as maintained

body weight after an intended weight loss of, for example, 10% (Wing & Hill, 2001; Wing & Phelan, 2005) or 5% (Stevens, Truesdale, McClain, & Cai, 2006) of initial weight, is maintained over a year. In this study, we are interested in life-long successful weight management. The focus is on people, who have managed to maintain a stable weight throughout life.

Population studies have explored factors that contribute to changes in weight. Regular physical exercise (Fogelholm & Kukkonen-Harjula, 2000) and the intake of fiber-rich foods (Fogelholm, Anderssen, Gunnarsdottir, & Lahti-Koski, 2012) are associated with less weight gain. Similarly, a prudent diet pattern, comprised of high intake of fruits, vegetables, fish and whole grains, is associated with lower weight gain, according to a systematic review (Fogelholm et al., 2012). However, typically population-based studies focus on predefined hypotheses on the association of some behavioral factors and weight change on group level. It is not clear if this kind of an approach can capture more

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: anu.joki@helsinki.fi (A. Joki), johanna.m.makela@helsinki.fi (J. Mäkelä), mikael.fogelholm@helsinki.fi (M. Fogelholm).

complicated individual issues.

In order to get more insight into weight management, we feel that population-based quantitative data should be supplemented with individual-based and hypothesis-free approaches. We aim to bridge this gap with a qualitative approach, which is rarely applied in obesity research. This unique approach may open up new dimensions of lifelong success in weight management which researchers in hypothesis-based studies have not been able to examine. We need to understand why some people succeed and which factors and forms of behavior could explain their success. Life-long maintainers as informants lead this research closer to solving the mystery of successful weight management.

In this study, for gaining insight into weight management from an individual perspective, we analyzed individuals' views and thoughts on their own long-term weight management and the perceived success. A subsidiary objective is to explore the requirements for maintaining the normal weight in an obesogenic environment. By interviewing men and women, we were also prepared to analyze gender differences.

2. Methods

This qualitative study, based on 39 semi-structured theme interviews, explored successful life-long weight management. The empirical study was conducted in Finland. In the present study, successful weight management is defined as the ability to maintain a normal weight (body mass index, BMI, between 18.5 and 24.9) during one's lifetime. The anonymity of the participants was guaranteed, and they were aware of their right to withdraw from the study. The ethics committee of Human Studies at the University of Helsinki reviewed the research in 2012.

The study used the snowball sampling method to find suitable participants. This method is useful when informants are members of certain subgroups. An existing participant is encouraged to recruit possible future participants among acquaintances (Flick, Kardoff, & Steinke, 2004). The participants recruiting started from the Public Works Department of the City of Helsinki and from the parish union of Helsinki, where the principal investigator (AJ) had contacts. We mailed an invitation letter with information about the research and the criteria for participation to two employees at these workplaces who forwarded it to the possible participants. Subsequently, the principal investigator (AJ) e-mailed to each eligible and interested candidate and offered him or her detailed information about the research. In addition, to recruit additional participants, the principal investigator (AJ) promoted the study in her social networks.

The participants were men and women from two different age groups (age 30–45 and 55–70 years). They had maintained normal weight throughout their lives. The women had gained some weight during pregnancy but had returned to their regular weight or at least to normal weight range after delivery. All participants lived in the metropolitan area in Finland.

The participants' characteristics are shown in Table 1. It should be noted that the information is based on self-report. Average BMI was 22.6. The education level varied, but most of the informants had studied at least 13 years. They were physically active: with the exception of four informants, they exercised few times per week.

The study comprised 41 interviewees; however, the analysis is based on 39 participants. We excluded two participants, who during the interview reported they had had a weight-gain period. The number of interviews proved to be satisfactory as during the interviews and the analysis as certain codes such as weight control means, food relationship, dietary habits and eating restriction were saturated.

Semi-structured theme interviews are flexible and offer

Table 1

The characteristics of the participants.

	Women	Men
Age:		
30–45 yrs	10	9
55–70 yrs	10	10
Education:		
0–9 yrs	2	1
10–12 yrs	5	3
13 yrs or more	13	15
Smoking/using snuff:		
Yes	–	4
No	20	15
BMI, (kg/m²)		
Average: 22.6	22,04	23,2
Leisure-time physical activity:		
Daily	3	2
4–6 times/week	3	3
2–3 times/week	12	12
Once a week	1	1
Less frequently	1	1

opportunities to adjust the interview structure adequate for every interviewee (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). Typically, there is a list of questions to address, but the interviews are not identical. With different types of probing (the “echo” probe, the “tell me more” probe, and the long question probe), the success of in-depth interviews is improved; Bernard & Ryan, 2010). Probing assisted in answering the answers without too strong influence by the interviewer.

Results from the previous, mainly quantitative studies (Elfhag & Rossner, 2005; Hill, Wyatt, Phelan, & Wing, 2005) were used to create six interview themes. Participants reflected on their relationship to food and eating in the interviews. Further, they defined weight and eating management and factors associated with and potentially affecting their weight, as well as discussed the connections between weight management and health behavior.

Experiences from three pilot interviews (the participants belonged to the study's target group) improved the probing technique of the questions. The interviewer added the long question probes (Bernard & Ryan, 2010) which are suitable for sensitive questions, for instance, introducing the following topic through an illustration. The pilot interviews were not used in the final analysis.

Finally, the interviewer had a list of questions and themes for discussion. The principal investigator conducted all 39 interviews, which lasted from 45 min to 2 h. The interviews were held in settings the informants had selected: the participants' home (20), work (16) or the University of Helsinki (3). After each interview, the researcher wrote interview memos. Participants received a book to thank them for their participation. All interviews were recorded with a digital voice recorder and transcribed verbatim for a total 463 pages.

The conventional content analysis, appropriate for great amounts of textual information and fields with limited existing research findings (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), yielded the results of this study. Atlas.ti software was used to assist in the systematic analysis of the data (Seale, 2005). In the first phase of the analysis, the transcribed data was entered in the program. After rigorous rereading, the researcher extracted text quotations that characterized the significant information concerning the research questions (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). First, the text quotations were grouped into 18 codes. For example, text referring to the reasons for participants' eating and hunger were assigned the code “Hunger and satiety,” and text referring to efforts to maintain a stable weight were assigned the code “Weight control efforts.” In the following phase, the researchers discussed and evaluated the adequacy of the

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5043994>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5043994>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)