

Minorities at Risk

By Sylvia Bridges

Obesity is a problem that many Americans face. Usually the concern is for adults. However, Drs.

Penny Gordon-Larsen, a Dannon Institute postdoctoral fellow in interdisciplinary nutrition science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Carolina Population Center, Barry M. Popkin, professor of nutrition at the UNC-CH schools of public health and medicine, and Robert G McMurray, professor of physical education, exercise and sports science, decided to research obesity occurring in adolescents.

According to the results, minorities are less active than whites and are at a greater risk of becoming obese. Their research shows that adolescents, especially females, do not exercise adequately.

"Childhood and adolescent obesity is a major public-health problem for American youth, particularly because it is increasing rapidly, lasts into adulthood, and is associated with illness and premature death," said Dr. Gordon-Larsen. "Physical activity on the other hand, has been shown to improve bone health, reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease and promote psychological well-being," she said.

The information conducted during the study was compared with the information found in the National Longitudinal Study of

Adolescent Health on more than 13,000 7th to 12th graders. The information was obtained through surveys that consisted of 3,135 African Americans, 2,446 Hispanics, and 976 Asians.

The results appeared in the September issue of the "Journal of Pediatrics:"

*The average number of hours spent watching television weekly for boys was 14.4 for whites, 15 for Asians, 16.6 for Hispanics and 20.8 for blacks.

*The statistics for girls watching TV was 11.9 for whites, 12.8 for Asians, 14.6 for Hispanics and 20 for blacks.

*The amount of time the youth were inactive (watching TV or playing video games) show about the same ratio as before.

*Obesity was most common among black females at 39.4 percent and lowest among Asian females at 11.1 percent.

Another group of doctors did research on a similar topic. Drs. David Freeman, William Dietz, Sathanur Srinivasan and Gerald Berenson wrote "The Relationship of Overweight to Cardiovascular Risk Factors Among Children and Adolescents". This research expanded on the previous topic. Now that we know black adolescents have the biggest risk of becoming obese, we need to find solutions to stop the problem and learn to deal with those adolescents who are already obese.

Obesity is only the beginning of a list of health problems. According



to Dr. David Freeman, "Overweight children are also at an increased risk for various chronic diseases in later life."

One way to control obesity is to have regular visits to your doctor's office. If obesity starts to arise, the doctor will be there to assist you with an exercise or health program. Dr Amitai Ziv's study stated that, "Within the adolescent cohorts, whites were over represented and blacks and Hispanics were underrepresented."

Dr. Gordon-Larsen said, "As we expected, this work confirms that physical activity is very low for American youth," said Gordon-Larsen. Programs aimed at minority adolescents are even more important because those young people seem to have the highest risks. That does not mean that non-minority kids are highly active. Overall, U.S. adolescents spend very little time being physically active and spend a substantial amount of time in inactive pursuits, such as watching TV." However, all three studies show that black adolescents are less active than their white counterparts, which increases their chances of being overweight.