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Opinion

Obesity and the Relationship between Personal Social Networks

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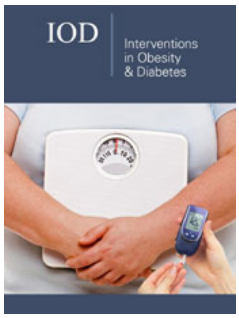

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Opinion

Global projections predict that by 2030 the world will have 1 billion obese people, with 1 in 5 women and 1 in 7 men will be living with obesity by 2030 [1]. People with obesity have a higher risk of mortality from chronic non-communicable diseases, such as cardiovascular diseases [2] diabetes mellitus [3] and some types of cancer [4]. And in adolescence, it can lead to related cardiometabolic complications in adulthood [5]. Furthermore, adolescents with obesity are more likely to have depression, anxiety, low self- esteem, difficulty making friends, being victims of bullying, eating disorders [6,7] and having adiposity in adulthood [8]. Obesity is defined by the World Health Organization as an abnormal or excessive accumulation of body fat that poses a health risk [9]. It presents a multifactorial etiology that encompasses genetic, environmental, socioeconomic, and behavioral influences [10]. A complex disease in which its prevention and control require an expansion and enlargement of the interventions selected for its treatment throughout life.

Therefore, the treatment and prevention of obesity should not only focus on their individual choices of diet, physical activity, and health behaviors. Changes must be made to social and cultural norms, across all sectors (education, healthcare, marketing, and the food and beverage industries) and in diverse settings (schools, workplaces, and the community) [5]. It is necessary to treat obesity from the point of view of each stage of life. Adolescence is the phase that is most influenced by the environment. From this perspective, it is essential that the problem of obesity is also analyzed from the point of view of the environment of social relationships, where adolescents share their ideas, influences, and behaviors. It is within social networks that configure relationships, in which adolescents are inserted and share their aspirations, health behaviors, or lifestyles such as physical activity, eating habits, and academic performance, among others.

Social relationships can positively influence health, with protective effects, or can also influence health negatively. It is through the analysis of social networks, defined as a set of actors linked together through social ties [11], that currently exhibits great importance as a tool that adds to the study of the control and treatment of weight gain in obesity. In this way, it opens other perspectives of understanding, in the field of causalities and the possibility of intervention to stop the spread of obesity in the adolescent population.

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