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Body size and weight, and the nutrition and activity behaviours of sexual and gender minority youth: findings and implications from New Zealand

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Abstract

Objective:

To describe the body size and weight, and the nutrition and activity behaviours of sexual and gender minority (SGM) students and compare them with those of exclusively opposite-sex-attracted cisgender students. Male and female SGM students were also compared.

Design:

Data were from a nationally representative health survey.

Setting:

Secondary schools in New Zealand, 2012.

Participants:

A total of 7769 students, 9 % were SGM individuals.

Results:

Overall, weight-control behaviours, poor nutrition and inactivity were common and, in many cases, more so for SGM students. Specifically, male SGM students (adjusted OR; 95 % CI) were significantly more likely to have tried to lose weight (1.95; 1.47, 2.59), engage in unhealthy weight control (2.17; 1.48, 3.19), consume fast food/takeaways (2.89; 2.01, 4.15) and be physically inactive (2.54; 1.65, 3.92), and were less likely to participate in a school sports team (0.57; 0.44, 0.75), compared with other males. Female SGM students (adjusted OR; 95 % CI) were significantly more likely to engage in unhealthy weight control (1.58; 1.20, 2.08), be overweight or obese (1.24; 1.01, 1.53) and consume fast food/takeaways (2.19; 1.59, 3.03), and were less likely to participate in a school sports team (0.62; 0.50, 0.76), compared with other females. Generally, female SGM students were more negatively affected than comparable males, except they were less likely to consume fast food/takeaways frequently (adjusted OR; 95 % CI: 0.62; 0.40, 0.96).

Conclusions:

SGM students reported increased weight-control behaviours, poor nutrition and inactivity. Professionals, including public health nutritionists, must recognize and help to address the challenges facing sexual and gender minorities.

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