

The development of childhood obesity through dysfunctional parental attitudes

Kakouros, E., Maniadaki, K., & Karaba, R.

Obesity is estimated to be the most common health problem in children with detrimental impact not only on their physical but, even mostly, on their psychological health. However, despite the rapid increase of the prevalence of childhood obesity over the last years, current theories regarding its etiological mechanisms are limited to the investigation of congenital causes. Moreover, a growing body of evidence focuses solely on the detection of factors such as family lifestyles (e.g. TV watching) and eating habits that are closely related to obesity. The aim of this presentation is to provide a theoretical model for childhood obesity, based on the latest research findings and the long clinical experience of the scientific collaborators of the Psychological Center “ARSI”. Within the framework of cognitive approach, it is proposed that several mental health problems are linked to distorted perceptions. From our point of view, dysfunctional parental attitudes about the role of food in everyday life and the function it serves may lead to pressing and overprotective family practices about nutrition. These perceptions and behaviours may then be adopted by children, through social learning and reinforcement, and lead to childhood obesity. Finally, the role of the above theoretical model in the prevention and treatment of childhood obesity is discussed.