

# **The role of mindful parenting and children/adolescents' weight on mothers' feeding practices, beliefs and attitudes**

Maria Gouveia, Maria Cristina Canavarro, Helena Moreira

*Center for Research in Neuropsychology and Cognitive-Behavioral Intervention, Coimbra, Portugal*

Background and objectives: Mindful parenting postulates that parents intentionally adopt a non-judgmental, accepting and mindful attitude in parent-child interactions. Although one may suppose that a mindful approach in parenting can contribute to more adaptive practices, beliefs and attitudes regarding child feeding, this relationship has never been investigated. This study explores whether mindful parenting and children/adolescent's Body Mass Index (BMI) are associated with mothers' practices and attitudes regarding their use of controlling child-feeding strategies (i.e., food as reward, monitoring, restriction, and pressure to eat), and with mothers' concern about child weight and perceived responsibility for child feeding, in a sample of mothers of children and adolescents with different weights (normal, overweight, and obesity). Methods: The sample included 275 mothers of children/adolescents aged between 8 and 18 years with overweight/obesity (BMI  $\geq$  85th percentile) in nutritional treatment, 257 mothers of children/adolescents with overweight/obesity without nutritional treatment, and 633 mothers of children/adolescents with normal weight (BMI = 3-85th percentiles). Participants completed self-reported measures of mindful parenting (Interpersonal Mindfulness on Parenting Scale) and of parental practices, beliefs and attitudes regarding child feeding (Child Feeding Questionnaire).

Results: Mothers of children/adolescents with overweight/obesity receiving nutritional treatment presented lower levels of the mindful parenting dimension "emotional awareness of the child" and of pressure to eat, and higher levels of concerns about child weight, restriction and monitoring, compared to the other groups. Regression analyses showed that some of the mindful parenting dimensions and the child's BMI significantly predicted mothers' feeding practices, beliefs and attitudes. For instance, having children without overweight/obesity, higher levels of emotional awareness of the child and of non-judgmental acceptance of the parental functioning predicted lower levels of concerns about child weight, restriction, and pressure to eat.

Discussion and Conclusion: Mothers of children/adolescents with overweight/obesity receiving nutritional treatment presented more dysfunctional parenting practices compared to mothers of the other groups. Some dimensions of mindful parenting were linked to mothers' child-feeding practices and attitudes. Therefore, promoting a mindful approach in parenting might help mothers adopting more adaptive child-feeding practices, beliefs and attitudes, especially in the context of pediatric obesity.