

The protective effect of adolescent's dispositional mindfulness on the association between weight and shame

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Background and objectives: The experience of shame, such as external shame (i.e., the perception that others hold negative beliefs about the self) and body shame (i.e., the perception that others evaluate our physical body or part of the body as inferior, flawed, or unattractive), usually arises during adolescence and may be higher in individuals with increased weight. Nevertheless, little is known about the psychological resources that can protect adolescents from experiencing shame. This study explores whether the associations between adolescent's weight (Body Mass Index z-scores) and two types of shame (body shame and external shame) are moderated by mindfulness skills.

Methods: A sample of 692 adolescents of different weights (63% had normal-weight and 37% had overweight/obesity), aged between 12 and 18 years old, was recruited in public schools and in the nutrition outpatient services of two public hospitals. Participants completed self-reported measures of dispositional mindfulness (Child and Adolescent Mindfulness Measure), body shame (Body Shame subscale of the Experience of Shame Scale) and external shame (Other as Shamer Scale - 2). Two moderation models were tested using the PROCESS computation tool for SPSS.

Results: adolescent's mindfulness was found to buffer the effect of adolescent's weight on body shame and on external shame. Specifically, although the link between weight and body shame was significant at low, moderate, and high levels of mindfulness, that association weakened as mindfulness increased. The same occurred for the link between weight and external shame for low and moderate levels of mindfulness. For high levels of mindfulness, having an increased weight was not associated with experiencing external shame.

Discussion and Conclusion: the results suggest that as weight increases the risk of experiencing body and external shame also increases. Nevertheless, adolescent's mindfulness skills may buffer the effect of weight on body/external shame, by making adolescents with higher levels of mindfulness less likely to experience body shame and external shame. These results suggest that promoting mindfulness skills, particularly among adolescents with higher weight, might help adolescents diminish the experience of body and external shame.