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Center for Latin American, Caribbean & Latino Studies

The Rates of Overweight and Obesity across Racial/Ethnic Group: Focus on Latinos and Latino Subgroups

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The Center for Latin American, Caribbean and Latino Studies is a research institute that works for the advancement of the study of Latin America, the Caribbean, and Latinos in the United States in the doctoral programs at the CUNY Graduate Center. One of its major priorities is to provide funding and research opportunities to Latino students at the Ph.D. level.

The Center established and helps administer an interdisciplinary specialization in Latin American, Caribbean and Latino Studies in the Masters of Arts in Liberal Studies program.

The Latino Data Project was developed with the goal of making information available on the dynamically growing Latino population of the United States and especially New York City through the analysis of extant data available from a variety of sources such as the U.S. Census Bureau, the National Institute for Health, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and state and local-level data sources.

All Latino Data Project reports are available at <http://web.gc.cuny.edu/lastudies/>

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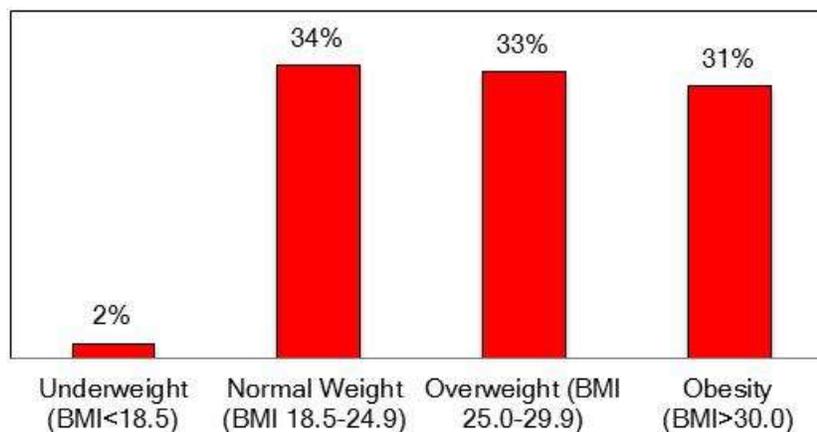
Americans on average are increasingly becoming more overweight and the problems associated with higher levels of obesity are growing. In the U.S. the Latino population has higher rates of overweight and obesity compared to other racial/ethnic groups. Overall the Latino population has higher rates of overweight, obesity, and type 2 diabetes (the most severe consequences of obesity) compared to non-Hispanic Whites, non-Hispanic Blacks, and Asians in United States (Haas et al, 2003; Ogden et al, 2006; Whitaker and Orzol, 2006; etc.). This report analyzes the differences in rates of overweight and obesity across racial/ethnic groups as well as Latino national origin subgroups, focusing on the demographic, socioeconomic, and behavioral health factors that are known to be highly correlated to overweight and obesity status.

Data and Variables

The National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) 2010 data has been used for this report. The NHIS 2010 data was chosen because it has respondents' body mass index (BMI) as well as many variables that describe their demographic, socioeconomic and health status. About 40% (N=21,707) of all respondents (N=55,479) reported their BMI, which is measured by dividing one's weight (kg) by the square of his/her height (m). Therefore, this report only includes adult respondents (age 18-64) who reported their BMI.

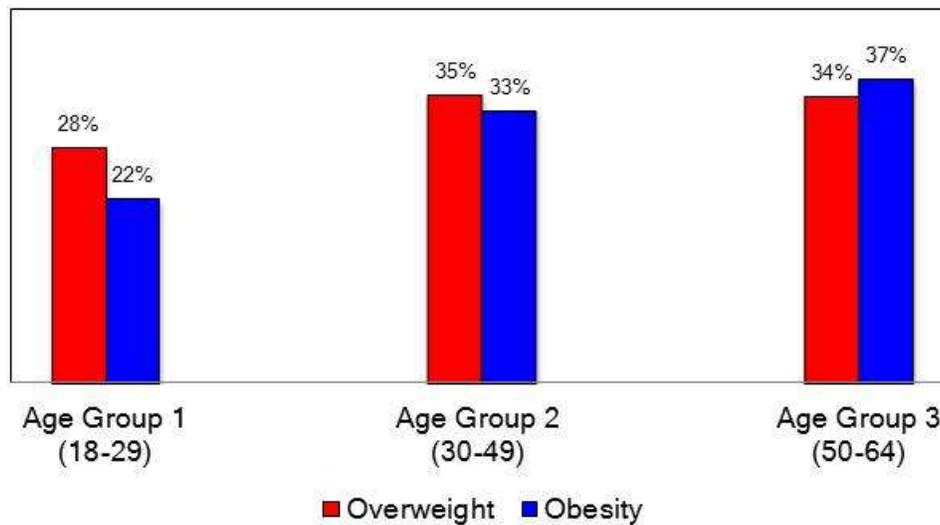
Overview- All Racial/Ethnic Groups

Figure 1
Percentage of Weight Categories (All Races)



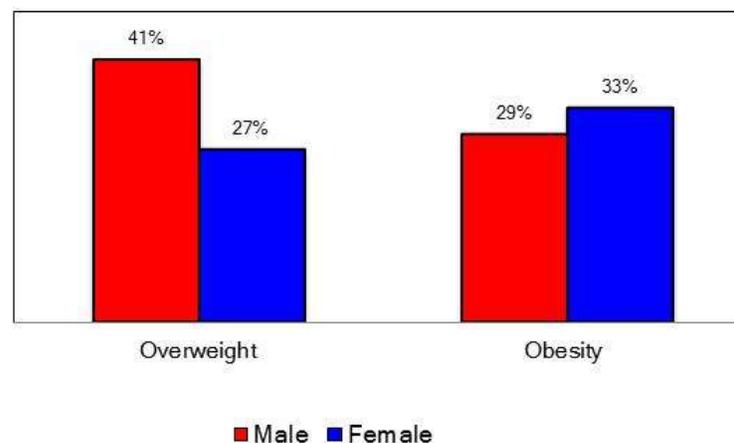
As Figure 1 shows, overweight and obesity are serious issues among Americans. Less than 2% of the NHIS 2010 respondents are underweight and only 34% are in the normal weight category. The distribution of normal weight, overweight, and obese is quite equal (about one-third for each category). About one third of Americans are overweight, and another third is obese. When overweight and obese categories are combined, more than half of Americans are either overweight or obese.

Figure 2
Overweight and Obesity Rates by Age Groups (All Races)



Are Americans getting more overweight or obese as they get older? Different age groups show different overweight and obesity rates. Older adults are overwhelmingly more overweight and obese than the youngest adult age group. About half of the respondents of the youngest group (Group 1) are either overweight or obese whereas almost 70% of older groups (Groups 2 and 3) are either overweight or obese. The middle age group (Group 2) and the oldest group (Group 3) show worse weight category distribution (higher rates of overweight/obesity) (see Figure 2).

Figure 3
Overweight and Obesity Rates by Gender

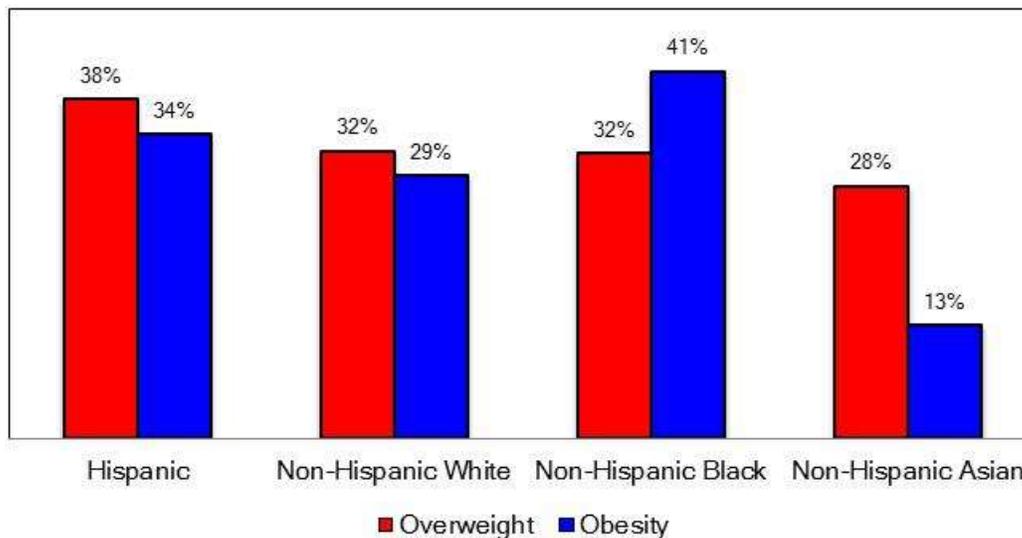


The overweight and obesity rates also differ across respondents' gender (see Figure 3). Male and female respondents show different pattern of overweight and obesity distribution. Male respondents are more overweight but less obese than their female counterparts. When overweight and obesity categories are combined, about 70% of male respondents, and about 60% female respondents are either overweight or obese.

Demographics

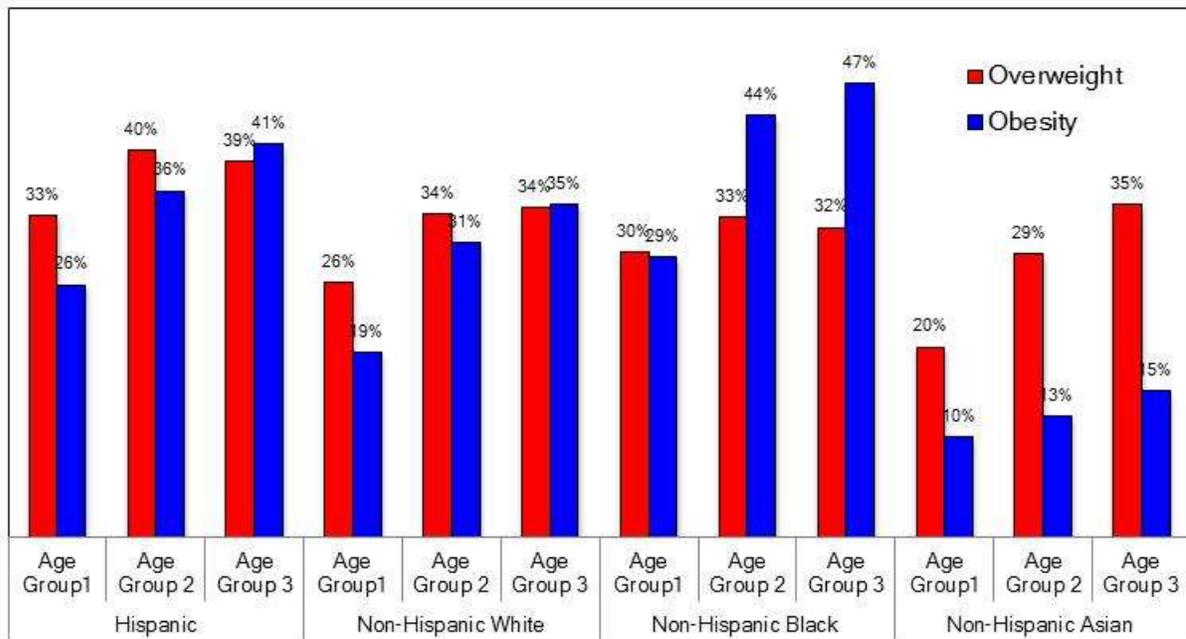
Four different racial/ethnic groups show varying rates of overweight and obesity (see Figure 4). While, all groups have high rates of overweight and obesity comparatively more Hispanics are overweight and obese than other racial/ethnic groups. Hispanic respondents are more likely to be overweight than any other racial/ethnic group (38%), followed by non-Hispanic Whites (32%), non-Hispanic Blacks (32%), and Asians (28%). Hispanic respondents still show second highest obesity rates (34%), following non-Hispanic Blacks (41%). When overweight and obesity categories are combined, seven in ten Hispanic respondents are either overweight or obese. The only racial/ethnic group that has higher rates of combined categories of overweight and obesity than Hispanics is non-Hispanic Blacks. Slightly more than half of non-Hispanic Whites and less than half of Asian respondents are either overweight or obese.

Figure 4
Overweight and Obesity Rates by Racial/Ethnic Groups



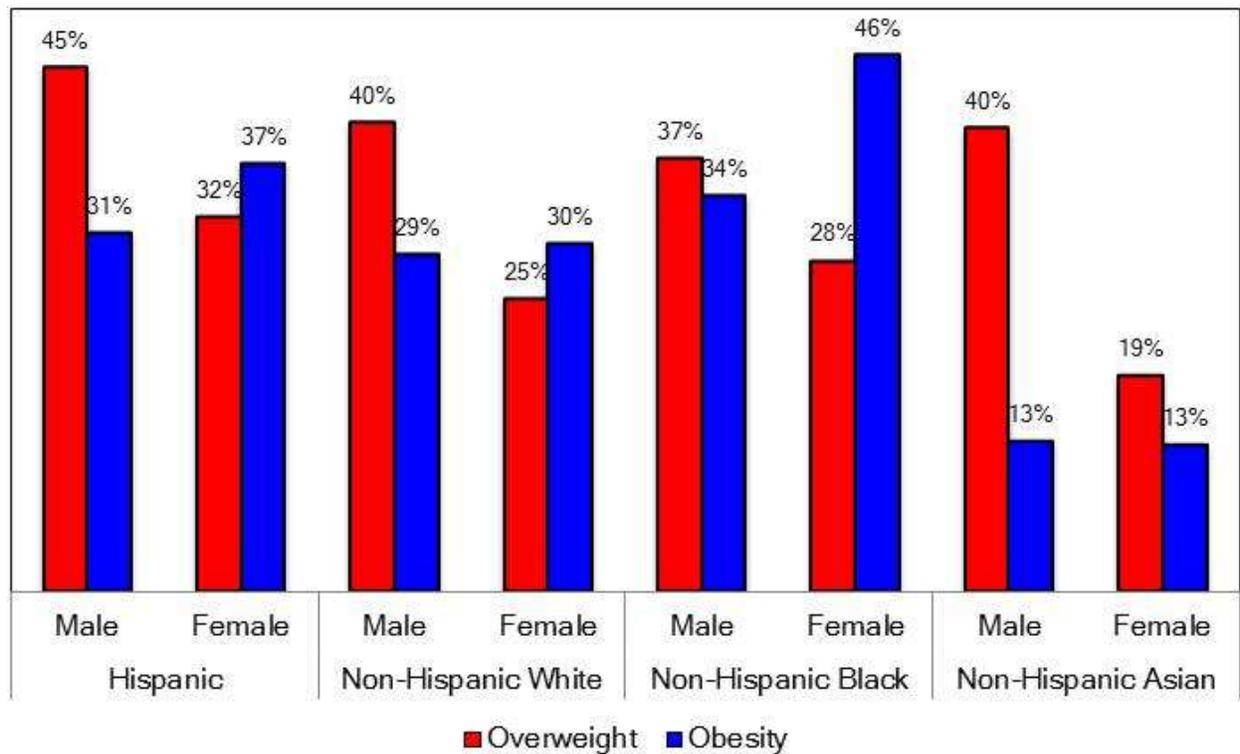
Generally, older respondents show higher overweight and obesity rates regardless of their race and ethnicity. Overall, Hispanic respondents present higher rates of overweight across all age groups compared to other racial/ethnic groups. Among all respondents, older Hispanic respondents (Groups 2 and 3) show the highest rates of overweight - about 40% of Hispanics in these two age groups are overweight. Hispanic respondents still show higher obesity rates compared to non-Hispanic White and Asian respondents. Only non-Hispanic Blacks have higher obesity rates than Hispanic respondents. In sum, all racial/ethnic groups show similar patterns in terms of their age and overweight/obesity rates; the youngest adult group (those who are 18-29 years old) appear to have better weight distribution, and the middle and oldest age group are much more overweight or obese compared to the youngest group across all racial/ethnic groups. (See figure 5).

Figure 5
Overweight and Obesity Rates by Race/Ethnicity and Age



Overall, male respondents have much higher overweight rates and slightly lower obesity rate compared to their female counterparts. This pattern remains constant when respondents are grouped by their race/ethnicity (see Figure 6). Male Hispanic respondents have the highest overweight rates (45%) and female non-Hispanic Black respondents show the highest obesity rates (47%). Asian respondents show the highest difference in overweight rates by gender; the gap of overweight rates between male and female Asians is over 20%. Non-Hispanic Black respondents have the largest gap in obesity rates by gender (12%), followed by Hispanic respondents (6%).

Figure 6
Overweight and Obesity Rates by Race/Ethnicity and Gender



The overweight and obesity rates across four geographical regions (Northeast, Midwest, South and West) in the U.S. are quite evenly distributed within each racial/ethnic group (See Figure 7). Hispanic respondents who live in the West showed the highest overweight rates (40%), followed by Hispanics in the Northeast (38%), the South (37%), and the Midwest (34%). The order of highest obesity rates among Hispanic respondents differs from overweight rates; Hispanics who reside in the Midwest show the highest obesity rates (37%), followed by the South (36%), the West (33%), and the Northeast (31%). When overweight and obesity categories are combined, Hispanics in the South (73%) show the highest rates, followed by those who live in the West (73%), the Midwest (71%), and the Northeast (69%).

Figure 7
Overweight and Obesity Rates by Race/Ethnicity and Region

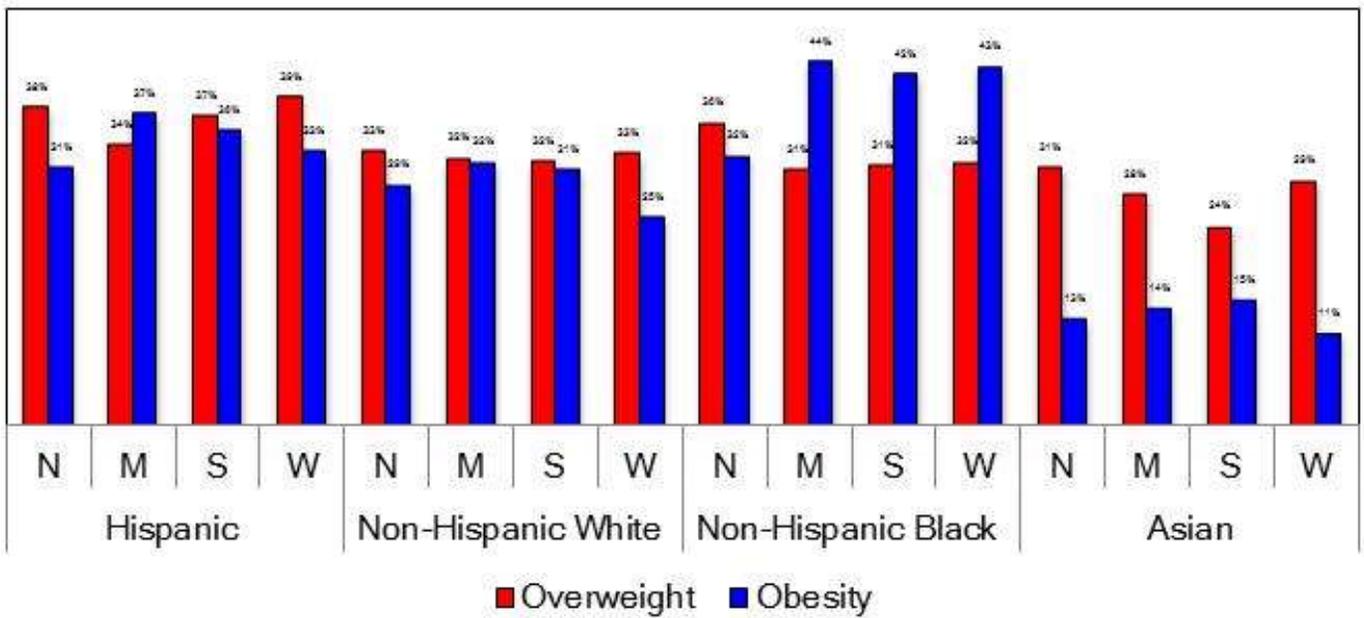
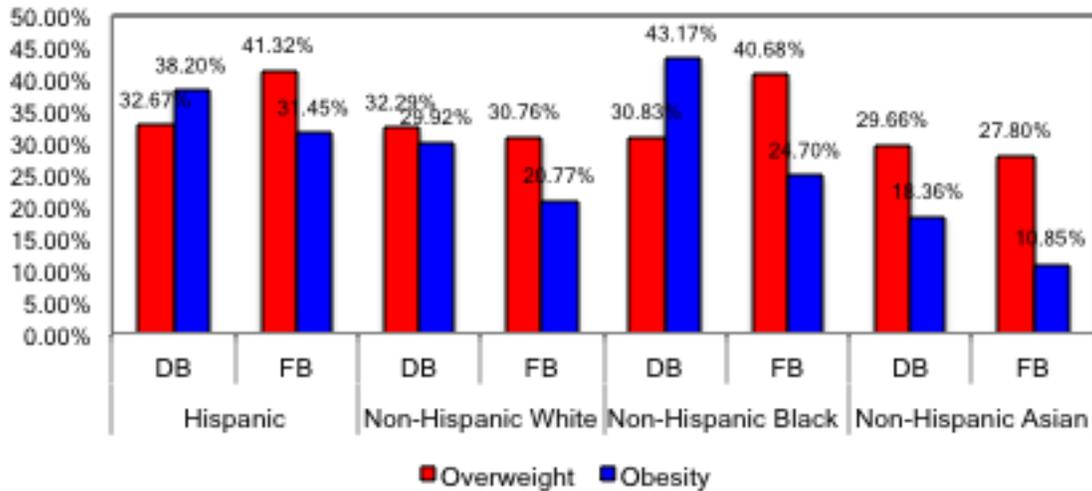


Figure 8
Overweight and Obesity Rates by Race/Ethnicity and Place of Birth



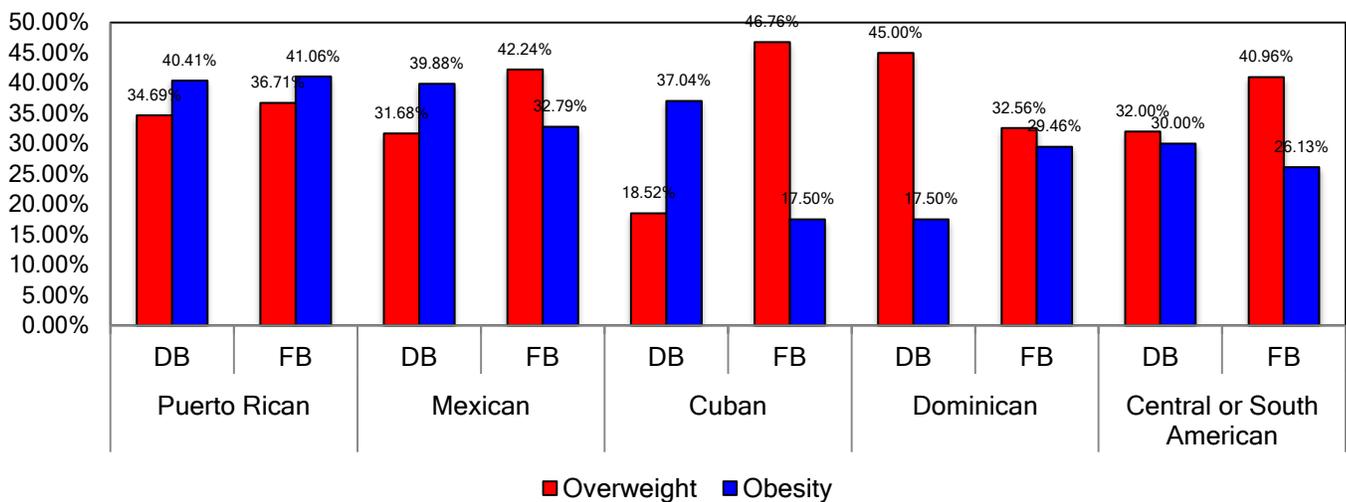
Note:

DB=Domestic-Born; FB=Foreign-Born

Across all racial/ethnic groups, the overweight and obesity rates vary by the respondents' place of birth yet there was no singular pattern for the weight distribution. For some groups, domestic-born respondents (e.g. Hispanic and non-Hispanic Blacks) show lower rates of overweight people, but higher obesity rates compared with their foreign-born counterparts. In contrast, other groups (e.g. non-Hispanic Whites and Asians) display a different pattern; there is no difference in overweight rates between domestic-born and foreign-born whereas domestic-born show higher obesity rates compared to their foreign-born counterparts.

Foreign-born Hispanics had the highest overweight rates, and the second highest rates of overweight and obesity combined, following domestic-born non-Hispanic Blacks. When overweight and obese categories are combined, foreign-born Hispanics have slightly higher rates compared to domestic-born Hispanics.

Figure 9
Overweight and Obesity Rates by Hispanic Subgroups



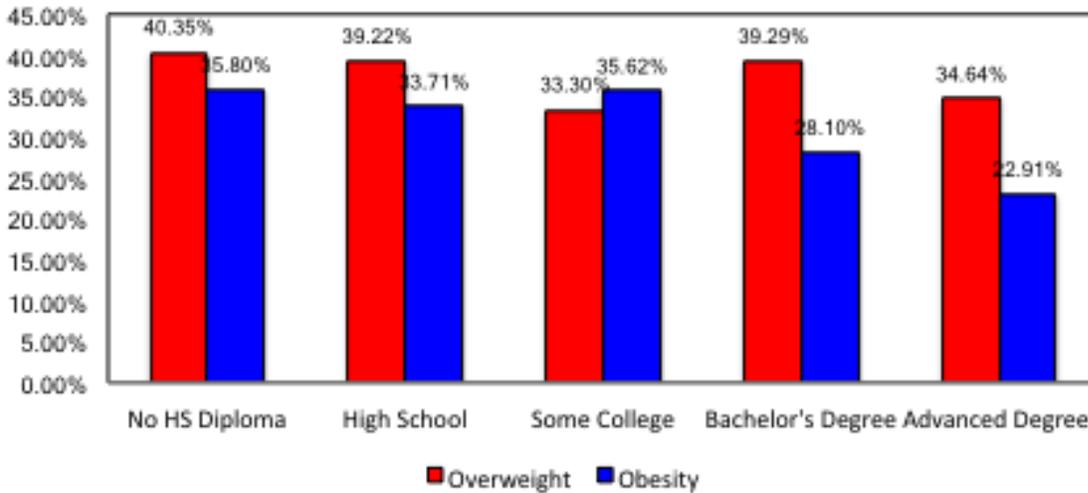
Note: DB=Domestic-Born; FB=Foreign-Born

Figure 9 indicates that five Hispanic subgroups have a diverse distribution in overweight and obesity rates. Moreover, the distribution varies by the place of birth (domestic-born or foreign-born) within same Hispanic subgroup, except for Puerto Ricans who show the highest obesity rates regardless of their place of birth. The overweight rate is extremely high for foreign-born Cubans, domestic-born Dominicans and foreign-born Mexicans.

Mexicans and Cubans show similar distribution of overweight and obesity rates by place of birth; foreign-born Mexicans are less overweight but more obese than their domestic-born counterparts. Compared to Mexicans, there is a surprisingly bigger gap in overweight and obesity rates by their place of birth among Cubans; more than double of foreign-born Cubans (46.76%) are overweight compared to domestic-born Cubans (18.52%). However, the pattern of obesity rate between foreign-born and domestic-born Cubans is opposite to the pattern of obesity rates; the obesity rates of domestic-born Cubans (37.04%) is about two times higher than the obesity rates of foreign-born Cubans (17.50%). Dominicans show a complete opposite pattern to Cubans; domestic-born Dominicans are much more overweight compared to their foreign-born counterparts while foreign-born Dominicans have higher rates of obesity compared to their domestic-born counterparts.

Socioeconomic Indicators

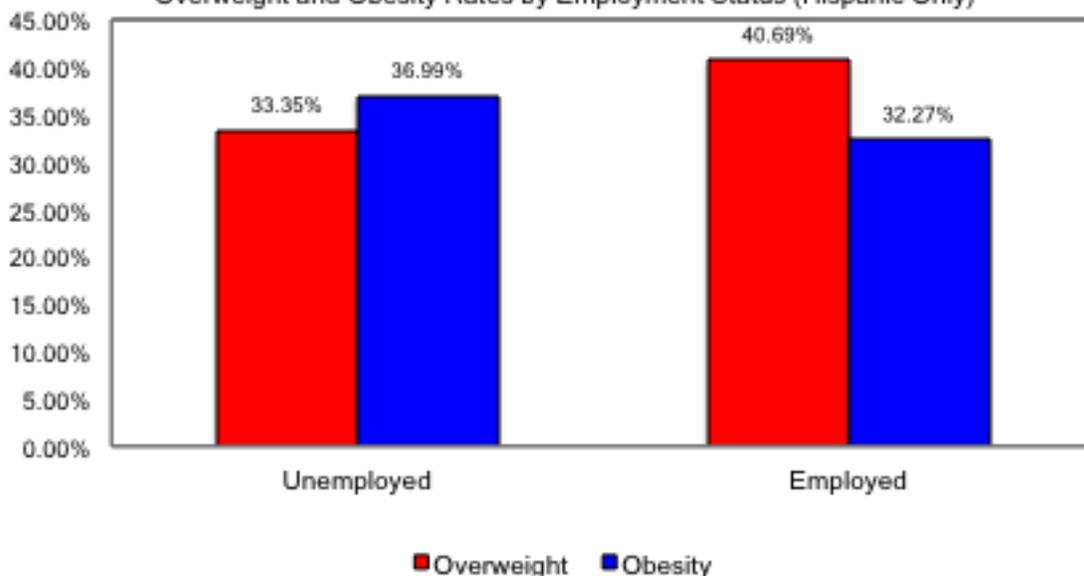
Figure 10
Overweight and Obesity Rates by Educational Level (Hispanic Only)



For Hispanics, as educational status improves so do overweight and obesity rates (see Figure 10). The rates of overweight and obesity are highest among the least educated Hispanics and lowest among the most educated Hispanics.

Overweight and obesity rates are known to be related to one’s socioeconomic status, such as education, income, and employment status. In order to analyze Hispanics’ overweight and obesity status by Hispanics’ employment status, Hispanics are divided into two groups: those who worked for pay at a job or business last week (employed) versus those who worked without pay, looked for a job, or didn’t work at all (unemployed). Using this measure about 65% of adult Hispanics in NHIS 2010 data were employed while 35% were unemployed.

Figure 11
Overweight and Obesity Rates by Employment Status (Hispanic Only)



Although Hispanic respondents have different rates of weight categories across employment statuses, the gap isn't big (see Figure 11). More unemployed Hispanics are slightly more obese compared to their employed counterparts. Interestingly, employed Hispanics have about 6% higher rates of overweight compared to their unemployed counterparts. When overweight and obesity categories combined, employed Hispanic respondents show slightly higher rates (72.96%) than their unemployed counterparts (70.34%).

Health Behaviors (Hispanic Only)

As shown earlier, Hispanic respondents present different overweight and obesity rates across demographics (age, gender, and place of birth) and socioeconomic (education and income) status. Since being overweight or obese is closely related to health behaviors, such as eating, drinking, and exercise the overweight and obesity rates by their health behaviors is analyzed in this report.

Previous literature has found that heavier soda consumption is positively associated with overweight and obesity statuses, i.e. the more soda one drinks the more likely one is to be overweight or obese. The NHIS 2010 data asks respondents about their frequency of drinking soda during the past month. Among Hispanic respondents, 31.66% answered that they never had soda last month. 26.44% responded that they drank soda once, 17.14% said they had soda twice, and 10.02% had soda three times last month.

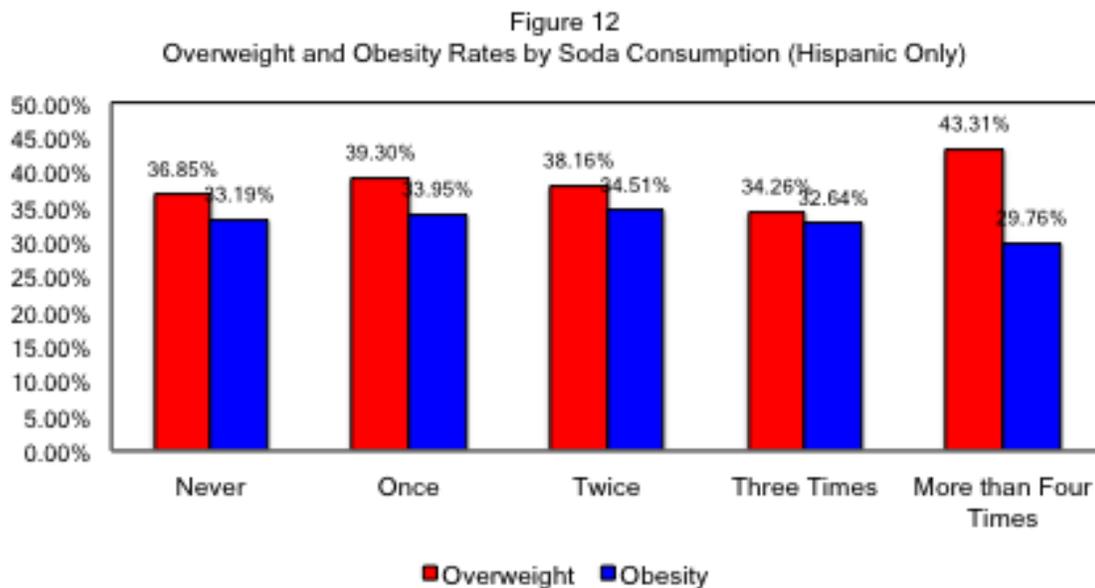
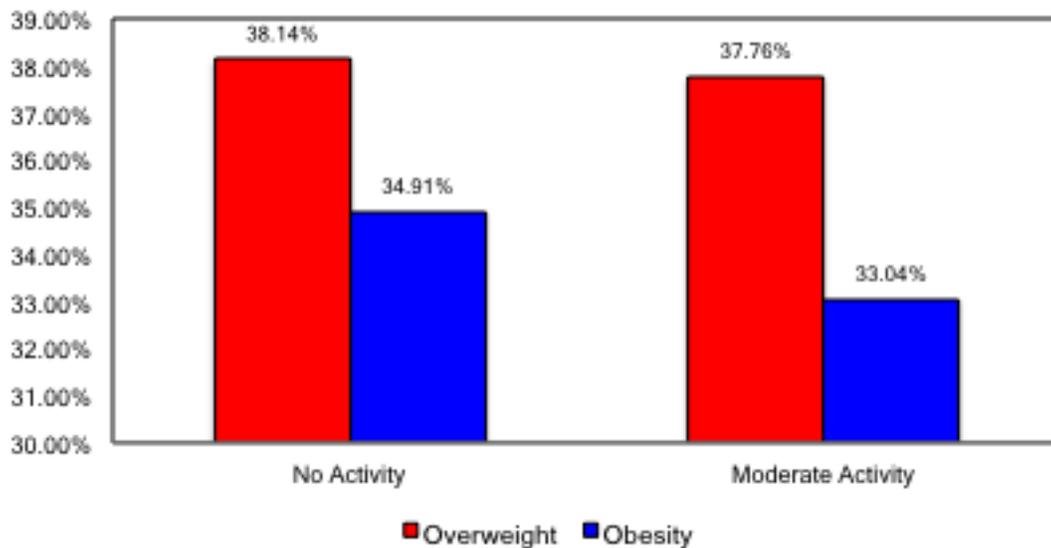


Figure 12 indicates the distribution of weight categories by Hispanic respondents' frequency of soda consumption in past month. The overweight rates are not very different by Hispanic respondents' frequency of soda consumption. Yet, Hispanics who never drank soda last month show relatively lower overweight and obesity rates compared to those who had soda once or more. Noticeably, Hispanics who reported consuming soda more than four times in the past month show the highest percentage of overweight (43.31%) compared to Hispanics who drank less soda or didn't drink soda at all.

Figure 14
Overweight and Obesity Rates by Activity Status (Hispanic Only)



Are Hispanics who moderately exercise less overweight and obese compared to the Hispanics who don't exercise at all? Figure 14 shows that Hispanics who do moderate activity showed slightly lower rates of overweight and obesity rates compared to their non-exercising counterparts.

Summary

- In 2010, more than half of Americans were either overweight or obese.
- Americans in older age group showed higher overweight and obesity rates than those in younger age group. This pattern was consistent across all racial/ethnic groups.
- Male Americans showed higher overweight and lower obesity rates compared to their female counterparts. This pattern remained across all racial/ethnic groups.
- Hispanics had higher overweight and obesity rates compared to other racial/ethnic groups.
- The overweight and obesity rates are fairly distributed by where they live, but Hispanics living in the South showed the highest rate of overweight and obesity combined.
- The overweight and obesity rates vary and there is no singular pattern of weight category distribution by race/ethnicity, Hispanic subgroups and place of birth.
- More educated Hispanics were less overweight and obese than less educated Hispanics.
- Hispanics did not show remarkably different overweight and obesity rates across health behaviors, such as eating, drinking, and exercising.