

The Relationship Between Body Weight Perception and Age in Women

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INTRODUCTION

Body weight perception is a component of the construct known as ‘body image’. Most studies have focused mainly on adolescent-aged females. This study examines the differences of perception of body weight and the proportion of women trying to lose weight within three different age categories. In addition, we investigate the perception of being overweight as well as the role television plays when women try to lose weight..

BACKGROUND

- Thinness is a common representation of beauty in Western culture (Barker, 2003)
- Media exposure of thin-idealisation might invoke body image disturbances in women (Grabe, et al., 2008).
- Body weight perception is a component of body image.
- Negative body image perception is an indicator for potential eating disorders (Ojala, et al., 2007).
- The desire to lose weight is strongly correlated with a negative perception of body image (Anderson, et al., 2002).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Are middle-aged women more likely to perceive themselves as overweight than younger or older women?
- Are middle-aged women more likely to attempt to lose weight than younger or older women?
- Does increased television time increase the likelihood of trying to lose weight? Does this likelihood change by age group?

METHODS

- Sample is 1940 women who participated in Food and Attitudes and Behavior Survey
- **Variables:**
 - Age group(Q57): Categorised into three age groups:
 - Younger adult group: 18-34 years
 - Middle adult group: 35-54 years
 - Older adult group: 55 years and older

METHODS (continued)

- “Trying to lose weight” was created using the question “are you trying to lose weight, gain weight, or neither?” The response is dichotomised into trying to lose weight vs. not trying to lose weight.
- “Over weight” was created using the question “How would you describe your weight?” The response was dichotomised into overweight vs. not overweight.
- “Tv-hours” was created using two variables that asked participants about the number of hours they watched television during the week and on the weekends. These measures were added to reflect the total amount of hours of television watched.

Data analysis:

- Chi-square to analyse the relationship between “Overweight perception” and age category
- Chi-square to analyse the relationship between “Trying to lose weight” and age category
- Logistic regression to determine the relationship between exposure to television and trying to lose weight, moderated by age.

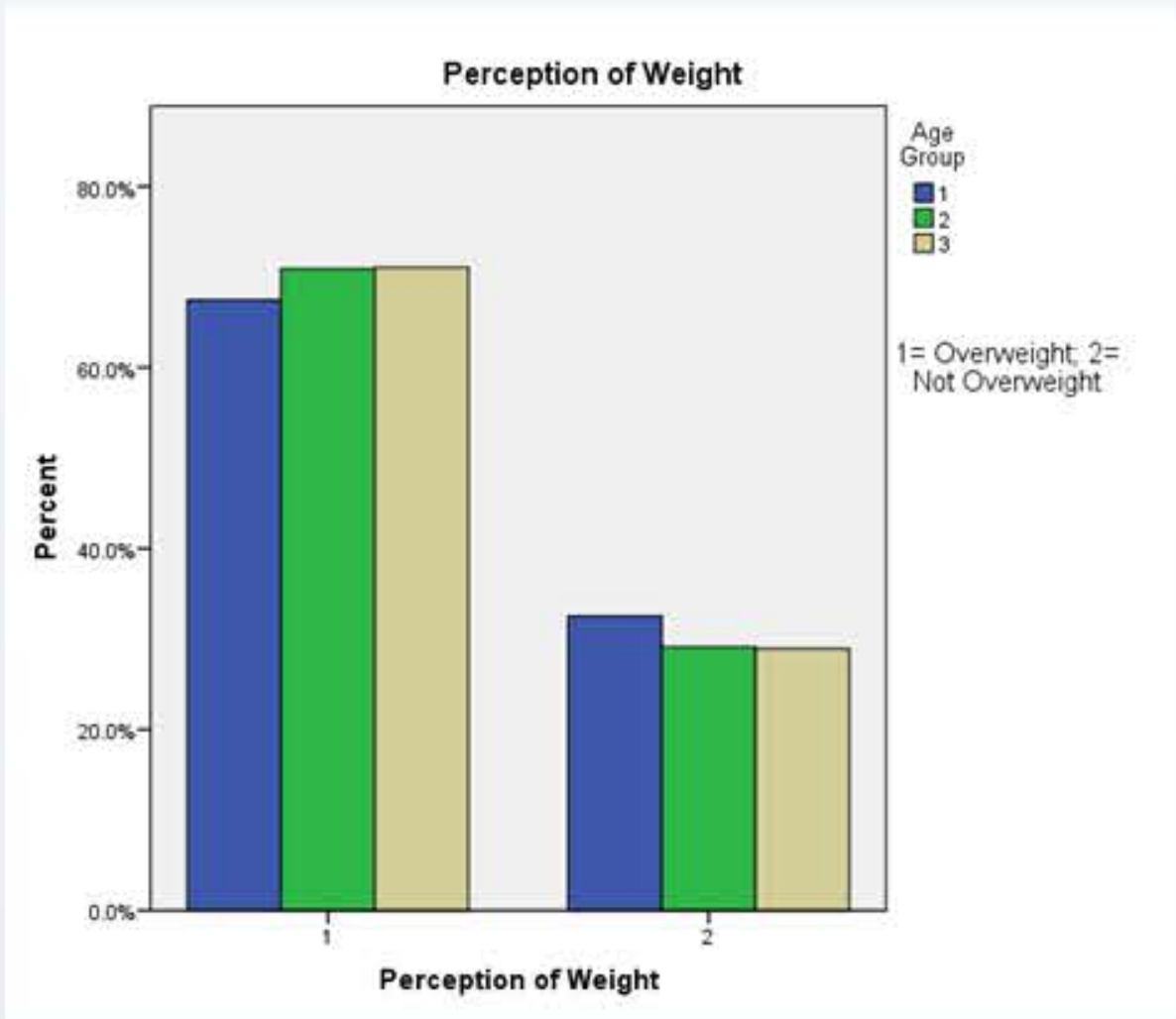
Characteristics of Participants

Characteristic	n	%
Total	1940	100.00
Age		
18-34	490	25.26
35-54	809	41.70
55 and older	641	33.04
Desire to Lose Weight		
Yes	1305	69.64
No	569	30.36
Perception of being Overweight		
Yes	1347	70.08
No	575	29.92
Race		
White	1315	68.81
Black	508	26.58
Other	88	4.60
Education		
Less than High School	207	10.74
High School Diploma	598	31.03
Some university, no degree	611	31.71
4-year university degree or higher	511	26.52

RESULTS

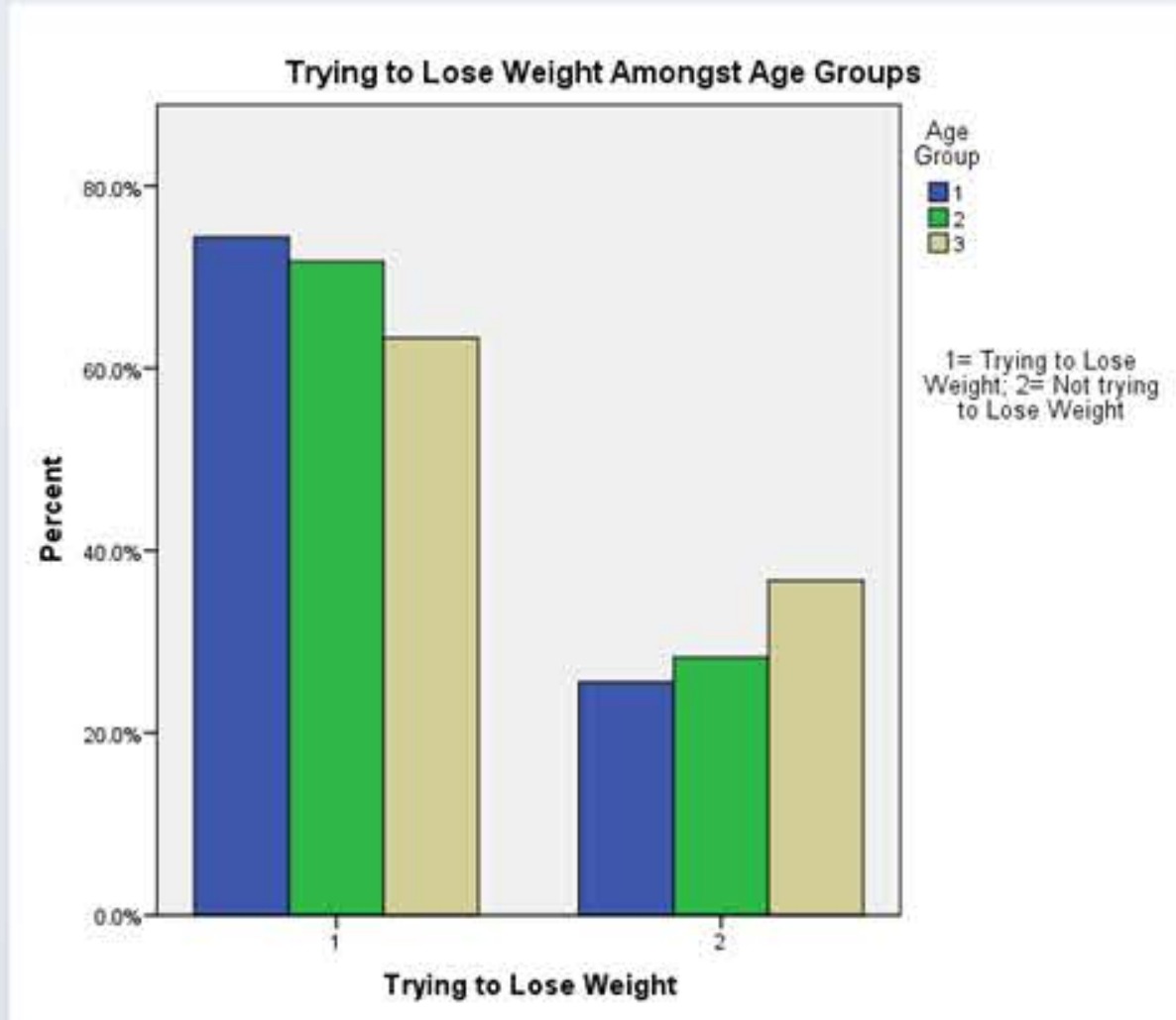
- Amongst the three agree groups, there was no statistically significant difference in perception of weight.

RESULTS (continued)



$$\chi^2 (2, n=1922) = 2.12, p = 0.3469.$$

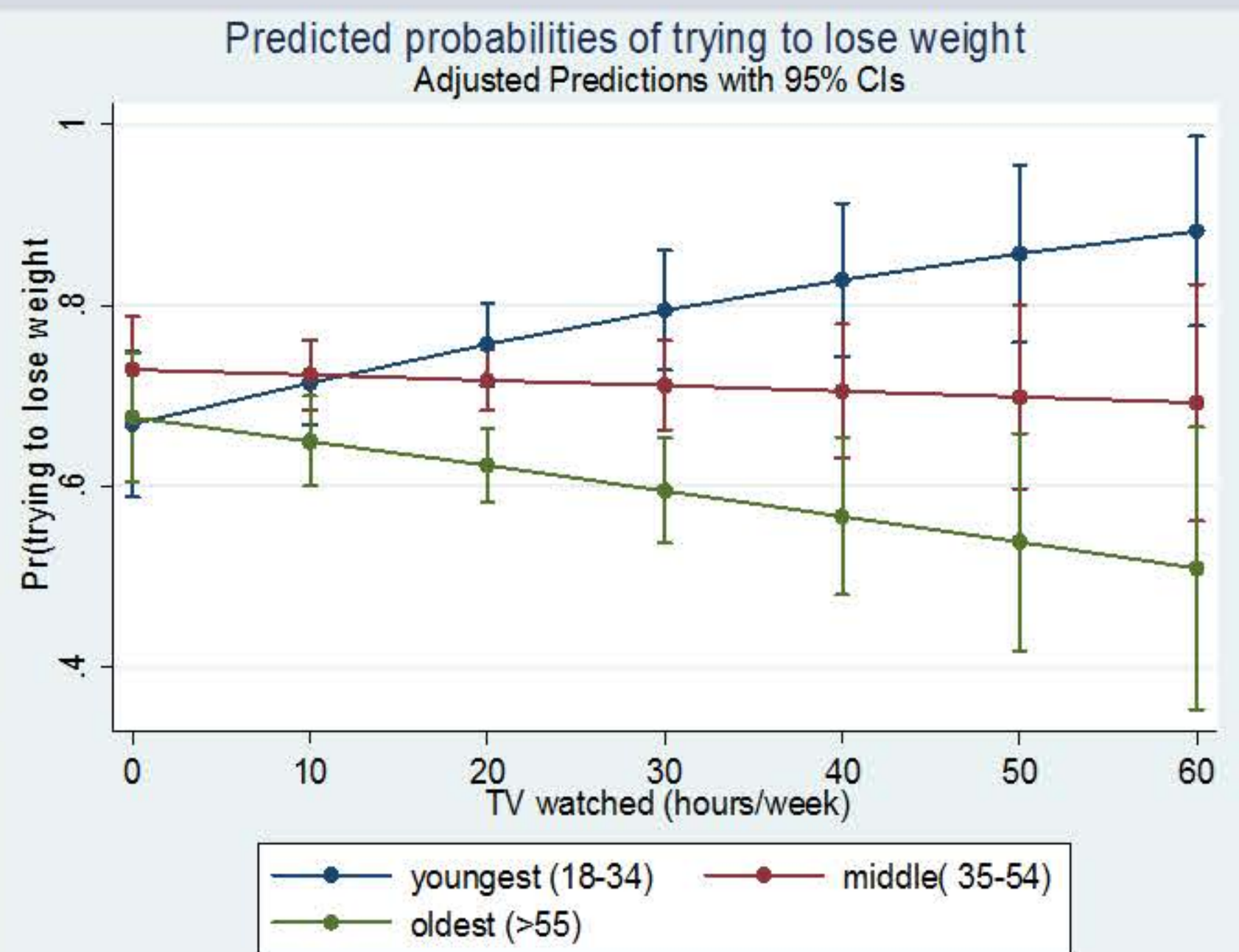
- The chi-square showed that there was a significant relationship between age group and Trying to Lose Weight:



$$\chi^2 (2, n=1874) = 18.42, p = <.0001.$$

- The number of participants trying to lose weight did not differ between the youngest and middle groups:
 $\chi^2 (1, n=1255) = 1.09, p = 0.2969.$
- However, there was a statistically significant difference between the middle and oldest groups, with the middle group trying to lose weight more than the older group:
 $\chi^2 (1, n=1397) = 11.16, p = 0.0008.$

Logistic Regression



RESULTS (continued)

- This study also explored the relationship between Trying to lose weight and Television hours watched and age group.

Dependent: Trying to Lose Weight	Model	P-value
Age (Q57) group 2	.2901271 (.2393581)	0.225
Age (Q57) group 3	.0346944 (.2497173)	0.890
Television hours watched	.0217933 (.010861)	0.045*
Television hours* Age group 2	-.0247541 (.0129953)	0.057
Television hours* Age group 3	-.0334224 (.0131594)	0.011*

*- significant $p < .01$

Age (Q57) group 1 used as reference group

- There was a positive relationship between the dependent variable “Trying to Lose Weight” and “Television hours watched” for the youngest group.
- Television hours watched was moderated by age group. More television watching increased the likelihood of the youngest group trying to lose weight whilst decreasing the likelihood of trying to lose weight amongst the oldest group.

DISCUSSION

- There was a statistically significant difference between the middle and oldest age groups and the category trying to lose weight.
- Increased television watching was positively associated with trying to lose weight; however, this was only applicable to the youngest age group and was moderated by age.
- This increase in television time had an opposite effect on the oldest group.
- No statistically significant differences were found in the relationship of perception of weight and age. This might indicate that the proportion of women who are dissatisfied with their weight is about the same across age groups. However, in order to investigate whether or not this dissatisfaction is constant over the course of one’s life, longitudinal data is needed and should be used in future research.

REFERENCES

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