

## Work Stress, Overeating Coping, and Central Obesity in US Workers

BongKyoo Choi<sup>1</sup>, Peter Schnall<sup>1</sup>, Haiou Yang<sup>1</sup>, Marnie Dobson<sup>1</sup>,  
Paul Landsbergis<sup>2</sup>, Leslie Israel<sup>1</sup>, Robert Karasek<sup>3,4</sup>, Dean Baker<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Center for Occupational and Environmental Health, University of California Irvine, Irvine, USA.

<sup>2</sup>Department of Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences, The State University of New York Downstate School of Public Health, Brooklyn, USA.

<sup>3</sup>Department of Work Environment, University of Massachusetts Lowell, Lowell, USA.

<sup>4</sup>Department of Psychology, Copenhagen University, Copenhagen, Denmark.

**Background:** Relatively little known about the relationship between work stress and central obesity.

**Aim:** To examine whether overeating coping (OC) is associated with central obesity and whether adverse psychosocial working conditions are associated with OC in US workers.

**Methods:** This cross-sectional analysis was based on the National Survey of Midlife Development in the United States (MIDUS) II dataset (2004-2006). The analysis included 955 male and 956 female workers (age range: 32 to 69). OC was measured by the following two questionnaire items on stress coping: "I eat more than I usually do." and "I eat more of my favorite foods to make myself feel better." Central obesity was defined with self-reported waist circumferences using the WHO criteria.

**Results:** 20% of male and 39% of female workers reported that they coped with stress by overeating. OC was highly associated with central obesity in men and women (odds ratios were 3.26 and 3.16, respectively). High job demands and low supervisor support increased the risk for OC in males after controlling for the covariates (e.g., socio-demographic variables, chronic diseases, and health behaviors). Low job control, low coworker support, and long working hours per week increased the risk for OC in females. High strain (low job control and high job demands) and passive (low job control and low job demands) jobs increased the risk for OC in female workers, but no such effect in male workers.

**Conclusions:** Adverse psychosocial working conditions were associated with central obesity via stress-related overeating coping in US workers.

**Key words:** job control, job demands, social support, job strain, work hours, obesity.

**Address for correspondence:** BongKyoo Choi, Center for Occupational and Environmental Health, University of California Irvine, 5201 California Avenue, Suite 100, Irvine, CA, 92617. Tel: 1-949-824-5130, Fax: 1-949-824-2345. E-mail: [b.choi@uci.edu](mailto:b.choi@uci.edu).