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## **Psychotherapy for 'At-Risk' Teenage Girls May Prevent Obesity**

**Bethesda, Md** -- A team of scientists at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (USU) and the National Institutes of Health have piloted psychotherapy for the prevention of excessive weight gain in teenage girls deemed 'at-risk' for obesity. The study, published in the *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, found that girls who participated in Interpersonal Psychotherapy (IPT) may be better able to prevent their body mass index (BMI) from increasing excessively over the course of a year compared to girls who took traditional health education classes.

Marian Tanofsky-Kraff, Ph.D., assistant professor in USU's Department of Medical and Clinical Psychology, led the team which aimed to target youth considered at high risk of obesity because of their above average weight and reported episodes of loss of control eating or binge eating. Both higher weight and loss of control eating are linked to excessive weight gain in children and adolescents.

"IPT focuses on improving interpersonal relationships by targeting the underlying social and interpersonal difficulties that influence individuals to engage in maladaptive behaviors," said Tanofsky-Kraff. "For this study we looked specifically at loss of control eating." IPT has been shown to help both depressed adults and youth and to help tackle binge eating in adult studies. Decreases in binge eating may lead to weight maintenance issues or modest weight loss over time compared with continued or increased binge eating.

"We conducted this study to address the dramatically increased rates of obesity in children and adolescents," said Tanofsky-Kraff. "IPT for Binge Eating Disorder is based on an assumption that binge eating occurs in response to poor social functioning and the consequent negative moods."

The trial randomly selected 38 girls, some with loss of control eating, to attend either IPT sessions or standard health education classes currently taught to teenagers. All participants completed their courses and received follow-up visits for the next year.

Girls who undertook IPT were more likely to stabilize or reduce their BMI than those who received the health education classes. BMI is a measure of body weight corrected for height and, when adjusted for age and sex, is used to determine appropriate weight gain in growing children and teens.

"This pilot study demonstrated that IPT is both feasible and acceptable to adolescent girls at risk for adult obesity and suggests that it may prevent excess weight gain," said Tanofsky-Kraff. "If IPT proves to be effective, we may be able to prevent not only excessive weight gain, but the development of related adverse health conditions in a subset of susceptible youth."

Located on the grounds of Bethesda's National Naval Medical Center and across from the National Institutes of Health, USU is the nation's federal school of medicine and graduate school of nursing. The University educates health care professionals dedicated to career service in the Department of Defense and the U.S. Public Health Service. Medical students are active-duty uniformed officers in the Army, Navy, Air Force and Public Health Service who are being educated to deal with wartime casualties, natural disasters, emerging infectious diseases, and other public health emergencies. Of the University's nearly 4,400

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physician alumni and more than 400 advanced practice nurses, the vast majority serve on active duty and are supporting operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere, offering their leadership and expertise. The University also has graduate programs open to civilian and military applicants in biomedical sciences and public health committed to excellence in the didactic and research training which have awarded more than 300 Ph.D. and 100 M.S. degrees to date.

For more information about USU and its programs, visit [www.usuhs.mil](http://www.usuhs.mil).