



Obesity among Poor Americans: Is Public Assistance the Problem?

Patricia K. Smith

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Obesity costs our society billions of dollars a year in lost productivity and medical expenses, roughly half of which the federal government pays through Medicare and Medicaid. We know obesity plagues the poor more than the non-poor and poor women more than poor men. Poor women make up the majority of adult welfare recipients--coincidence or causal connection?

This book investigates the controversial claim by welfare critics that public assistance programs like Food Stamps and the National School Lunch programs contribute to obesity among the poor. The author synthesizes empirical evidence from an array of disciplines--anthropology, economics, epidemiology, medicine, nutrition science, marketing, psychology, public health, sociology, and urban planning--to test this claim and to test whether other causal processes are at work.

With a lucid presentation that makes it a model for applying research to questions of social policy, the book lays out the different hypotheses and the possible causal pathways within each. The four central chapters test whether "public assistance causes obesity," "obesity causes public assistance," "poverty causes both public assistance and obesity," and "Factor X causes both." The factors in the last category that may relate to both public assistance and obesity include stress, disability, and physical abuse.

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