Bullies Target Obese Kids

By Susan Selz, HealthDay Reporte - May 3, 2010 (HealthDay News) — For kids, a few extra pounds could make them the target of bullies.

New research suggests that being overweight increases the risk of being bullied. Most studies usually apply a rule of thumb to the risk of being bullied: equal gains and losses in gender, race, and family income levels, we can’t rule out if you’re overweight — being overweight or obese — trumps all those other factors when it comes to aggressive behavior from other children.

The study found that being overweight increased the risk of being the target of bullying by 34 percent.

"One of the reasons for this study is that obesity is a much more common concern now. How fast that full half of kids are overweight or even larger, it doesn’t really change your status as a bully anymore, so we thought maybe kids wouldn’t be bullied by being overweight anymore," said study author Dr. Julie Lumeng, an assistant professor of pediatrics at the University of Southern California and the Children’s Hospital in Los Angeles. She added that the researchers also hoped they might be able to find some protective factors against being bullied, such as being involved in school activities.

"What we found, much to our dismay, was that nothing seemed to reduce it. If you were some sort of bully, you were more likely to be bullied, no matter what," she said.

Previous research has shown that boys, minorities and poor children from low-income groups are more likely to be bullied, so the researchers took three factors into account to see if they made a difference. The study authors also considered a child’s social skills and emotional stability, as well as their body mass.

"No matter how much we retested, the findings were very robust. Obese children tended to be the targets of bullying, whether they were in the first, fifth or ninth grades. The pouplcations were mostly white, but a full half of them were overweight or obese in the third grade," said study author Dr. Dana Rofey, an assistant professor with the Weight Management and Human Performance Laboratory at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. She added that the researchers also hoped they might be able to find some protective factors against being bullied, such as being involved in school activities.

"No matter what, we found the results were consistent across the whole data," said Lumeng. She said some of the research on obesity does not show that certain traits are correlated with the popularity or attractiveness of a person’s weight or appearance. "But, she asked, "obesity is really common, so it’s not that obvious. The brain-based disorder, and I hope that message becomes clearer.""