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**Title:** Exploring perceptions concerning weight status, and barriers to changing behaviour of primary school educators

**Background:** A survey of primary school educators conducted in the Western Cape found that more than 80% of educators in these schools were overweight (BMI  $\geq 25$ ) or obese (BMI  $\geq 30$ ). Furthermore, 56% of educators had a high waist circumference; indicative of increased cardiovascular disease risk (WC  $> 88$ cm) and hypertension (BP  $> 140/90$ ). In order to develop strategies to address the high prevalence of overweight and obesity in educators it was essential to firstly ascertain current perceptions regarding their weight status and also possible barriers to behavior change.

**Methods:** The HealthKick programme purposively selected 16 schools within the Western Cape which were then randomly assigned to self-implementation (control) and co-implementation (experimental) categories of a nutrition intervention programme to improve nutrition knowledge and behaviour. A qualitative approach was used to collect data on primary school educators and included focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. These were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim.

**Results:** Risk factors and behaviours for non-communicable diseases were prevalent in the educators' study. The majority showed a high interest in becoming leaner and more active. However, there were numerous barriers to this becoming a reality. The most commonly reported being lack of time, lack of knowledge about effective strategies, and lack of readiness to change.

**Conclusions:** Due to the high burden of obesity and other cardio-vascular disease risk factors in educators it is essential that strategies are developed to address these, particularly weight loss. Effective strategies for weight loss in educators are only possible if the barriers to change can be addressed.

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