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“It's not like fat camp”. A focus group study of adolescents' experiences on group based obesity treatment

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Background: Overweight and sedentary lifestyle is associated with somatic diseases, psychosocial problems and lower quality of life. Obesity in childhood is an increasing problem worldwide and prevalence increases into adolescence and adulthood. Few studies have explored the effects of obesity treatment in adolescence. Self-Determination Theory and Motivational Interviewing withhold an individual perspective from where and how to initiate an obesity treatment in order to succeed. Aim of the study This study aims to explore adolescents' motivation underlying obesity treatment and their experiences of participating in group-based obesity treatment programs.

Methods: in total, ten girls and seven boys in the age from 13 to 24 years were included from three different group based obesity treatment programs. All participants filled out a basic questionnaire regarding their age, sex, weight, length, medication use and from whom they had heard about the course All three interviews followed a semi-structured interview guide. A data-driven analysis representing an editing analysis style was conducted using systematic text condensation following a verbatim transcription of the tape-recorded interviews.

Results: The analysis resulted in 4 major themes: motivation, body experience and self-image, relationships and sense of belonging and the road ahead. Motivation to initiate a lifestyle change was to a large degree founded on dissatisfaction with body and appearance, and on influence from parents or healthcare providers. During the obesity treatment program the motivation shifted as new knowledge, personal insight and positive group experiences resulted in several positive physical and mental outcomes. Several participants had experienced bullying, and related their experience of being overweight to these experiences.

Conclusions: The individual experiences related to living with obesity in adolescence are important to explore. Personal experiences are often barriers for change, but also sources for self-efficacy experiences that may facilitate self-determined reasons for lifestyle changes.