

Weight Stigma Widespread in Lives of Obese Adults

The stigmatization of obese adults by employers, educators, health care providers, family members, romantic partners, and the media is rampant, according to a paper by Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity researchers in the current issue of the journal *Obesity*.

The [study](#) analyzes over 150 scientific studies published since 2000 that provide evidence of weight-based stigma, discrimination, social inequalities, and a range of harmful consequences for those who are obese, including vulnerability to depression, low self-esteem, poor body image, eating disorders, and exercise avoidance.

“Unfortunately, it does not appear that the increasing prevalence of obesity has attenuated negative societal attitudes towards obese people. In contrast, the growing science on this topic demonstrates that weight bias persists and research has expanded into new areas and this has shown that bias affects more areas of life than previously thought,” wrote authors Rebecca Puhl, PhD, Director of Research & Weight Stigma Initiatives, and Chelsea Heuer, MPH, Research Associate.

Among some of the more striking findings highlighted were:

- ▶ Obese employees are consistently discriminated against, paid less, and less likely to be hired for jobs than normal weight workers
- ▶ Physicians and other health care providers stereotype obese patients as lazy, lacking in willpower, and non-compliant with treatment
- ▶ Obese patients report being stigmatized and treated disrespectfully by their physicians, which leads them to avoid and cancel important preventive health care screenings
- ▶ Obese adults report being stigmatized by their friends, family members, and romantic partners
- ▶ Experiencing weight stigma poses emotional and physical health consequences such as depression, low self-esteem, poor body image, disordered eating, and exercise avoidance
- ▶ In television and film, obese characters are portrayed in negative roles that perpetuate stereotypes, and where they are openly ridiculed and laughed at

The study also summarizes the current status of legislation to prohibit weight discrimination, which except for the state of Michigan and a few localities, is non-existent. Despite clear evidence that weight discrimination reduces opportunities and produces inequalities for obese people, discrimination based on weight remains legal in most instances.

The authors concluded, “Without sufficient attention to this issue, it is likely that weight bias will remain both a social injustice and a public health issue, impairing the quality of life for both present and future generations of obese individuals.”

Click [here](#) to obtain a copy of the full article.