



Weight Discrimination: Prevalence and Comparison to Race and Gender Discrimination

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Weight Stigma

- Overweight & obese people are frequent targets of weight stigma & discrimination
- Many sources of weight bias: employers, health care professionals, educators, families
- Consequences of stigma for obese include physical & mental health, health care, but...
- Limited awareness of problem
- No legal sanctioning of weight discrimination



Research Objectives

- Provide national data on prevalence & patterns of weight discrimination in US
- Compare spread of and risk factors for weight vs. race & gender discrimination
- Evaluate health & social consequences of weight discrimination



Data: MIDUS

- Midlife Development in the United States (MIDUS) 1995-1996
- Nationally representative sample of community-based adults aged 25-74
- 2,290 individuals (1,104 men & 1,186 women)
- Includes measures of health, well-being, discrimination experiences & causes



Discrimination Measures

- Number of times in life discriminated against because of race, age, gender, weight
- Discrimination in institutional settings
 - Employment
 - Not hired, not given promotion, fired
 - Education
 - Not given scholarship, discouraged from high education
 - Service providers
 - Inferior treatment in health care, restaurants, police



Discrimination Measures

- Discrimination in interpersonal relationships
 - Treated with less respect, courtesy
 - Called names, harassed
 - Treated as inferior, not smart
- Day-to-day basis
 - Frequency of experiences (often ... never)
- Cause of discrimination reported



Causes of Discrimination

- Weight/height
 - Question in survey combines weight & height
 - Reflects weight as cause based on BMI analysis
- Gender
- Race
- Other
 - Age, religion, ethnicity, disability
- Discriminatory experiences in any interpersonal or institutional setting





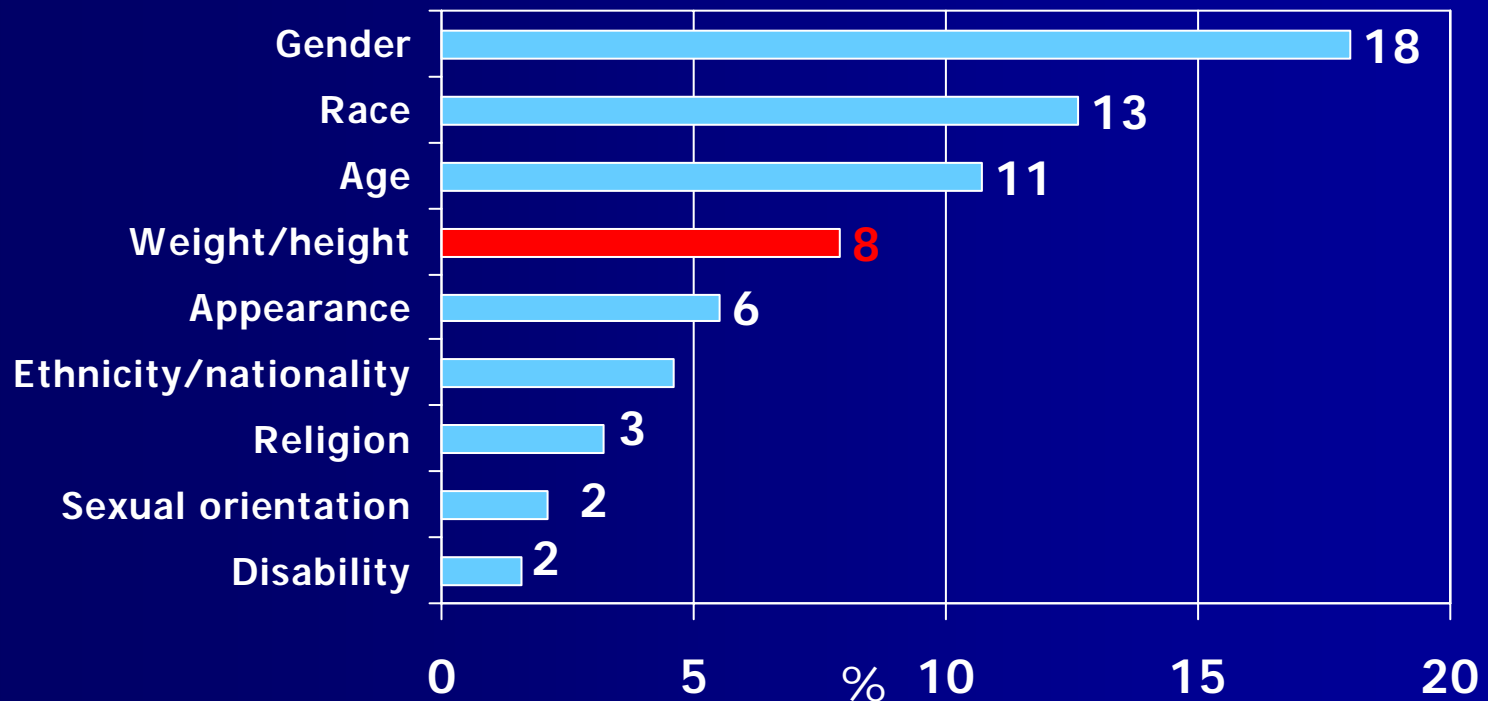
Predictors of Discrimination

- Socio-demographic characteristics
 - Gender, race, education, age, occupation
- Body weight status
 - Overweight (BMI 25-30), obese (BMI 30-35) & obese (BMI 35+)
- Differential effects of obesity by population group
 - Interactions of weight status with demographic characteristics



Common Stigmas in America

Prevalence of discriminatory experiences in any setting
by cause, MIDUS 1995-96





Settings of Discrimination

■ Major domain of institutional discrimination

Employment

– Not hired

- 60% if discriminated due to weight
- 53% if discriminated due to race
- 40% if discriminated due to gender

– Not given job promotion

■ Major interpersonal discrimination

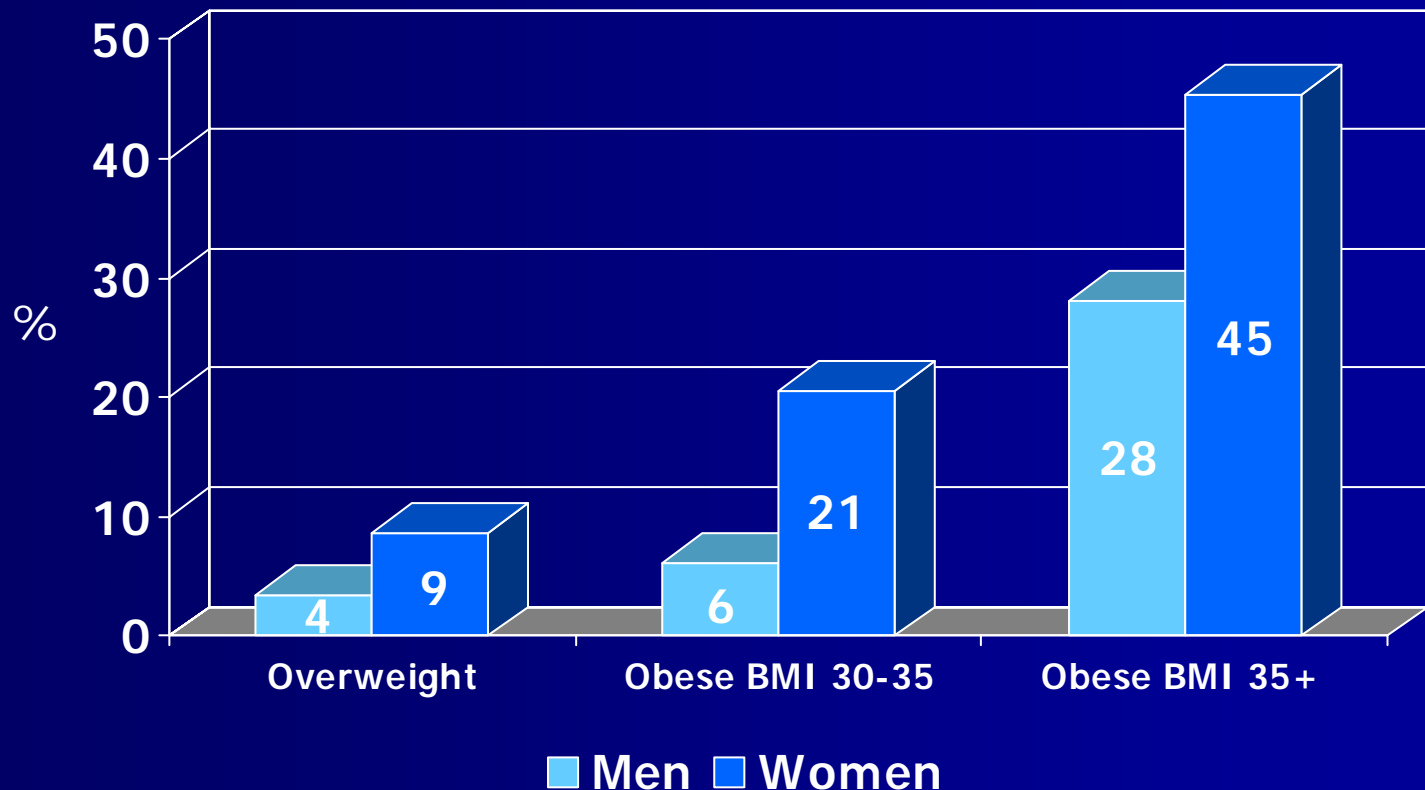
– Superiority (treated as inferior & with less respect)





Vulnerability to Weight Stigma

Prevalence of discrimination
due to weight/height in any setting





Risk Factors for Weight Discrimination

- Risk double for women vs. men
- Young adults
- Body weight status
compared to normal weight
 - 2.5 times higher risk for overweight BMI 25-30
 - 4 times higher risk in obese with BMI 30-35
 - 8 times higher risk in obese with BMI 35+
 - Obese in some professions at additional risk (sales/clerks)



Consequences of Weight Discrimination

- Poorer self-reported physical health
- More chronic conditions
- Greater rates of depression, anxiety & emotional disorders
- Lower perception of current & future life quality
- Less frequent use of routine medical care

Adjusted for body weight status, socio-demographics,
health behavior



Summary

- Weight discrimination common in America
 - 4th most prevalent form of discrimination
 - Rates close to race & age discrimination
 - Women at disproportionately greater risk
 - Institutional settings common sources of stigma
- Greater awareness of weight stigma needed
- Policy action to reduce weight discrimination warranted, including legal changes



Questions? Comments?

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Trends in Discrimination

