



HOW AND WHY WEIGHT STIGMA DRIVES THE OBESITY 'EPIDEMIC' AND HARMS HEALTH

Tomiyama, AJ, Carr, D, Granberg, EM, Major, B, Robinson, E, Sutin, AR, Brewis, A
BMC medicine. 2018;16(1):123

Weight stigma is defined as the social rejection and devaluation that accrues to those who do not comply with prevailing social norms of adequate body weight and shape. In this opinion-based study, authors discuss that:

- Latest literature indicates that weight stigma can trigger physiological and behavioural changes linked to poor metabolic health and increased weight gain.
- Healthcare is a setting in which weight stigma is particularly pervasive, with significant consequences for the health of higher-weight patients. This stigma has direct and observable consequences for the quality and nature of services provided to those with obesity.
- Stigma may be an unintended consequence of anti-obesity efforts, undermining their intended effect. Moreover, focusing solely on obesity treatment runs the risk of missing other diagnoses.
- The science of weight stigma crystallizes a key point for future success – to tackle the obesity 'epidemic' we must tackle the parallel epidemic of weight stigma.
- Public service messages are needed to educate people about the stigma, discrimination, and challenges facing higher-weight individuals.

Authors conclude that to advance as an equal society, healthcare providers should lead the way for weight stigma eradication.

DOES WEIGHT-RELATED STIGMATISATION AND DISCRIMINATION DEPEND ON EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AND LEVEL OF INCOME? A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW.

Bernard, M, Fankhänel, T, Riedel-Heller, SG, Luck-Sikorski, C
BMJ open. 2019;9(11):e027673

Obesity is a global health issue due to its association with many chronic diseases, including type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and certain cancers.

Stigmatisation and discrimination against people with obesity has increased over the past few decades. According to the "Theory of class" a person's general attitude, lifestyle and even body shape, can be seen as a metaphor for social status.

This systematic review of 17 studies investigated whether socioeconomic status is associated with "weight bias", that is stigmatising and discriminating attitudes towards people with obesity. 11 of the 17 studies found a significant association between educational attainment and/or income with stigmatising and/or discriminatory attitudes, but results were mixed.

The authors conclude that the findings have to be discussed in the cultural context, including cultural and governmental differences.



POTENTIAL UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF GRAPHIC WARNING LABELS ON SUGARY DRINKS: DO THEY PROMOTE OBESITY STIGMA?

Hayward, LE, Vartanian, LR
Obesity science & practice. 2019;5(4):333-341

Public health interventions need to balance the benefits with any potential harms. One proposed intervention for reducing sugar-sweetened beverage consumption involves placing graphic warning labels on products and advertisements. A recent study found that a graphic warning label that contained negative imagery of obesity reduced purchases of sugar-sweetened beverages. However, these labels may also promote obesity stigma, which is concerning given that weight stigma is associated with harmful health consequences including weight gain and increased risk of mortality.

Consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages is associated with increased body weight and poor nutrition and health outcomes, including Type 2 diabetes and coronary heart disease. The aim of this study was to test the hypothesis that the graphic warning promotes weight bias (Study 1) and is also viewed as stigmatizing by people with overweight and obesity (Study 2).

Study 1 Participants were randomly allocated to one of two conditions: a warning label condition (n = 324) or a control condition (n = 357). Results indicate that participants who were presented with the graphic warning label were more likely to intend to purchase water (instead of the soda) than participants who were presented with the standard label. Study 2 Participants (n=561) were randomly assigned to one of two conditions – overweight or obese. Results show that the majority of participants rated the warning label as personally stigmatizing. Moreover, after being exposed to the label, the participants experienced worse mood.

Authors conclude that it is important for policymakers to strike a balance between the benefits and costs of public health interventions.

