What is weight stigma?

A Brief Overview

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What is weight stigma?

**Weight Stigma:**
Societal devaluation of people because of their body weight or body size

**Common weight-based stereotypes:**
*People with higher weight viewed as...*
- Lazy
- Lacking self-discipline and willpower
- Unmotivated to improve health
- Personally to blame for their weight

Prevalence of weight stigma and discrimination

Percentage of American adults in the general population who experience weight stigma

Among adults who have obesity, prevalence rates of weight discrimination range from 19%-40%.

Weight stigma can affect anyone

- Sex
- Age
- Race and ethnicity
- Socioeconomic status
- Sexual orientation
- Gender identity
- Body size
- Nationality

Weight stigma exists across the lifespan

Age 3-5: Negative weight stereotypes begin in young children
Youth: Stereotypes worsen, leading to teasing and bullying
Adolescence: Bullying and exclusion from social groups
Adulthood: Weight stigma institutionalized as discrimination in employment, healthcare, education
Mid/late adulthood: Weight stigma and discrimination remain present

Where does weight stigma occur?
In the workplace

Unfair hiring practices

Wrongful termination

Lower salaries

Fewer promotions

Stereotyped by coworkers

In the media

Television and Film
• Depict characters with larger body sizes in stigmatizing ways
• Reinforce negative weight stereotypes based on body size

News Media
• Oversimplify causes of obesity
• Reinforce personal responsibility narrative
• Ignore complex contributors to body weight

Social Media
• Body shaming is commonplace
• Promotes unrealistic ideals of body size

Kite et al., *E Clinical Medicine* 2022; Media Empathy Foundation 2022; Throop et al., *Obesity* 2014.
In interpersonal relationships

Weight stigma within families:

- Critical and judgmental remarks about weight
- Weight-based teasing and rejection
- Can be long-lasting through childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood
- Harmful health consequences
  - Psychological distress
  - Disordered eating behaviors
In healthcare

Weight-biased attitudes from healthcare providers

Poorer provider-patient communication and reduced quality of patient care

Adverse health consequences for patients and avoidance of healthcare

Educational Resources

Videos
Podcasts
Fact sheets
Reflection exercises

How does weight stigma affect patients and contribute to poor health?