

Is It Worthwhile to Take Action Against Size Discrimination? What Research Tells Us About the Consequences of Inaction

Weight Bias and Eating Disorders

Effects of weight discrimination lead to worse emotional and physical health, increasing the risk of eating disorders, poor mental health, obesity, and mortality.

- American women who belonged to a national weight-loss organization who believed that weight-based stereotypes were true reported more frequent binge eating in response to stigmatizing experiences compared with those who reported stereotypes to be false. Study findings challenge the idea that discrimination and stigma may motivate people to lose weight.
- **Puhl RM, Moss-Racusin CA, Schwartz MB. Internalization of Weight Bias: Implications for Binge Eating and Emotional Well-being. *Obesity*. 2007; 15: 19–23.**
- Among people with binge eating disorder, internalized weight bias and discrimination were associated with worse impairment of physical and mental health in a study of treatment seeking adults.
- **Pearl RL, White MA, Grilo CM. Weight bias internalization, depression, and self-reported health among overweight binge eating disorder patients. *Obesity (Silver Spring)*. 2014; 22(5):E142–8.**
- A study of men and women who were labeled as overweight or obese found that experiencing negative assumptions and harassment in interpersonal relationships increased risk of depressive symptoms, eating disorders, and low self-esteem.
- **Puhl, RM and Brownell KD. Confronting and Coping with Weight Stigma: An Investigation of Overweight and Obese Adults. *Obesity*. 2006; 14: 1802–1815.**

Weight Bias and Children

Children's health, well-being, and academic achievement are harmed by weight bias, increasing the risk of childhood obesity and eating disorders.

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) assessed different ways in which weight bias can affect childhood obesity rates, eating disorder rates, and body image. Researchers examined different settings for weight discrimination, from bullying and teasing at school to bias from healthcare workers, education systems, and employers after childhood.
“Children need adults to advocate for them and to fight against weight bias, especially as new interventions are developed. Although the effects of weight bias are not as well known, the consequences are just as serious as excessive weight is on the welfare of the child.”
Washington RL. Childhood Obesity: Issues of Weight Bias. *Preventing Chronic Disease*. 2011; 8(5):A94.
- In another study, interviews conducted with K-12 teachers across America show that students who were labeled overweight or obese were perceived by teachers to be struggling academically and, have low academic motivation and likelihood to work hard compared to other peers despite having comparable scores on objective tests of academic performance. These findings suggest there are

disparities in quality of education available to children labeled as overweight or obese due to weight bias among educators.

Kenney EL., Redman MT, Criss S, Sonnevile K, and Austin SB. Are K-12 school environments harming students with obesity? A qualitative study of classroom teachers. *Eating and Weight Disorders*. 2017; 22(1): 141-152.

Weight Bias and Employment Discrimination

Size discrimination affects multiple aspects of employment, from the start of the hiring process to salaries and promotion.

- A literature review of 53 studies shows consistent evidence of weight bias against people who are considered overweight. This review included evidence of five types of employment discrimination due to weight, including negative weight- and appearance-related stereotypes of workplace abilities and perceptions of likelihood of achievement in a challenging work setting. People labeled as overweight were subject to unequal treatment in the workplace and faced barriers to employment, promotion, and occupational success due to weight bias.

Giel KE, Thiel A, Teufel M, Mayer J, & Zipfel S. Weight Bias in Work Settings—A Qualitative Review. *Obesity Facts*. 2010; 3(1), 33–40.

Weight Bias and Public Opinion

Americans show strong support for laws and policies for protection against size discrimination.

- The majority of Americans express public support for the government having specific laws and policies in place to prohibit weight discrimination. Americans showed strongest support for laws and policies that would prohibit employers and companies from employment and promotion denial as well as wage reduction based on weight.

Puhl RM, Latner JD, O’Brien KS, Luedicke J, Danielsdottir S, Salas XR. Potential Policies and Laws to Prohibit Weight Discrimination: Public Views from 4 Countries. *The Milbank Quarterly*. 2015; 93(4):691-731.

Strategic Training Initiative for the Prevention of Eating Disorders

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