

Weight Bias Internalization and Health: A Systematic Review

Weight bias internalisation (WBI) is the process by which individuals living with overweight and obesity adopt negative weight-related stereotypes against themselves and assume negative attitudes towards their own body weight. Weight bias internalisation can lead to negative physical and mental health effects.

This review aims to evaluate the relationship between internalised weight bias, physical and mental health, and to identify interventions to reduce weight bias internalisation and consequently improve health.

To assess WBI, studies predominantly used the Weight Bias Internalisation Scale or the Weight Self-Stigma Questionnaire. WBI was significantly and positively associated with depressive symptoms, anxiety, low self-esteem, and body dissatisfaction, amongst other psychological outcomes.

WBI also results in physical health outcomes. WBI was associated with disordered eating, specifically binge eating disorder. WBI also had effects on physical activity levels and cardiometabolic risk.

Interventions to reduce WBI primarily included psychological interventions, often combined with healthy eating for weight loss programs, such as Acceptance Commitment Therapy and interventions based on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy. These interventions have proved to be successful in improving WBIS scores, stereotype endorsement, and weight self-efficacy among participants.

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