

Weight stigma and bias – what is known? Rapid review of evidence

This rapid review from the University of Sydney, in collaboration with The Obesity Collective, provides a broad and comprehensive overview of weight stigma and bias.

The review addresses six main research questions:

1. What theoretical and conceptual constructs have been developed to explain weight stigma, sources, types of weight stigmatisation and possible target variables for prevention efforts?; Can the existing models be integrated to improve our conceptualisation of weight stigma?
2. What insights can research provide about the role of news, entertainment, social media with respect to the development of weight stigma and bias?
3. What, if any adverse consequences (in terms of weight stigma and bias) have been reported from anti-obesity campaigns, messages and strategies?
4. Where weight stigma and bias has occurred because of anti-obesity campaigns, messages and strategies, what evidence is available about the effects on physical and mental health?
5. What evidence is available on the effectiveness of interventions, policies or programs designed to prevent or reduce weight stigma and bias, especially regarding news, social, entertainment media and anti-obesity campaigns?
6. What insights can research offer to inform message framing and communication efforts in obesity prevention to avoid inadvertent weight stigma and bias?

Results of the rapid review include common themes such as: i) weight bias is common and has adverse health consequences; ii) shaming individuals for their body weight does not motivate positive behaviour change; iii) internalised weight bias is particularly problematic; iv) public health interventions, if not carefully thought out, can perpetuate weight bias; v) weight bias is a manifestation of social inequity; vi) action on weight bias requires an upstream, population-level approach; and vii) to achieve sustainable reductions in weight bias at a population level, substantive modifications and collaborative efforts in multiple settings are required.

Bellew, B., Grunseit, A., Huang, B., Kite, J., Laird, Y., Thomas, M., Williams, K. Weight stigma and bias – what is known? Rapid review of evidence. Prevention Research Collaboration at the Charles Perkins Centre. The University of Sydney. 2020.