

A qualitative analysis of people's experiences with weight-based discrimination

Individuals living with overweight and obesity are more likely to be subject to weight-based discrimination. Weight based-discrimination stems from weight stigma, bias, and inaccurate weight-based stereotypes.

This qualitative study aims to determine individuals' everyday experiences of weight-based discrimination and to identify common themes. Qualitative data on lived experience of weight-based discrimination was gathered from 32 participants through a process of interviews. Participants were interviewed to gain information on the following: 1) background information, 2) experiences with weight over lifetime, 3) attitudes toward obesity, 4) experiences with weight-based discrimination, and 5) responses to weight-based discrimination. Participants were queried about their experiences in a variety of settings (e.g., health care, education, employment, social media). A thematic analysis was conducted on the qualitative data gathered.

Results identified 5 primary themes of weight-based discrimination. The first four themes reflected interpersonal sources (offensive comments - the most common type of weight-based discrimination, negative assumptions, social rejection, and unwanted attention or bullying). The fifth theme reflected environmental or physical sources, including physical barriers such as inadequate seating, lack of clothing choice, medical equipment not designed for individuals living with overweight and obesity.

Three higher order themes that cut across people's experiences with weight-based discrimination were identified: 1) the often-ambiguous nature of weight-based discrimination; 2) intersections between body weight and other social identities; and 3) the role of social comparison processes.

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