

Weight-based victimization from friends and family: implications for how adolescents cope with weight stigma

Young people and adolescents are commonly subject to weight-based discrimination and stigmatisation. Adolescents have a heightened sensitivity to discrimination and stigmatisation, which can result in lifelong impacts. Evidence suggests that friends and family are common perpetrators of weight-based victimization, but little is known about the relationships among sources of discrimination and coping mechanisms in adolescents.

This study aims to examine the relationships between weight-based victimisation from four different sources:

1. Friends
2. Family members
3. Peers
4. Teachers

The study also aims to elucidate stigma-specific coping responses used by adolescents. The study included 148 participants. Data was gathered via a questionnaire which investigated participants' bullying experiences, responses to weight-based discrimination, weight-bias internalisation, and perspectives on strategies to address weight-based bullying.

Results showed that different sources of weight-based victimization have important associations with adolescents' responses to and coping strategies for dealing with weight-based victimization. Frequency of weight-based teasing from peers, friends, parents and teachers accounted for a substantial amount of variance in coping with weight-based victimization. Weight teasing from friends was associated with greater frequency of negative emotions. Weight teasing from peers and friends were associated with greater frequency of coping via avoidance behaviours, whilst teasing from family was associated with fewer avoidance behaviours. Adolescents reported wanting more support from parents and stronger school policies to address weight-bullying.

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