



Perception of overweight and obesity from different angles: a qualitative study

Knowledge and understanding of the way in which people view and perceive individuals living with overweight and obesity within specific population groups and the general public is vital in order to develop stigma-reduction interventions.

The aim of the study was to develop an appropriate questionnaire to be used in a survey to follow and further enhance existing instruments in understanding perceptions of individuals living with overweight and obesity.

Qualitative focus group interviews were used to develop an interview schedule for the project. Three focus groups were conducted, including individuals living with overweight and obesity, those with normal weight, and healthcare professionals.

The focus groups were presented with a series of questions relating to 3 themes:

1. The definition of overweight
2. Controllability (of overweight and obesity)
3. Emotional response (to overweight and obesity).

Results show that the definition of obesity is a subjective construct influenced mainly by aesthetics, sympathy, and activity. Within the groups, obesity was mainly seen as a controllable condition; however, external (such as societal) factors were named as well. Living with overweight and obesity was predominantly associated with negative emotions.

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