

What words should we use to talk about weight? A systematic review of quantitative and qualitative studies examining preferences for weight-related terminology

The link between weight stigma and its harmful impact on physical and mental health has led to a more open discourse about how body weight and obesity should be discussed. Body weight can be an extremely sensitive topic to speak about, and it is important that non-stigmatising language is used.

This review aims to elucidate individuals' perceptions of, and preferences for, weight-related terminology.

Results of the review included the fact that individuals preferred 'neutral' terminology, such as references to 'weight', 'BMI', and 'unhealthy weight'. The terms "fat," "fatness," "obese" and "morbidly obese" were rated as least acceptable and most undesirable across studies.

Additionally, attitudes and preferences towards language varied by ethnicity, gender, and weight status.

The review also included records investigating healthcare professional's attitudes towards language. Physicians indicated that they would be most likely to use the term "weight" or the phrase "your weight may be damaging your health". They were least likely to refer to "fatness," "excess fat," "heaviness" and "large size".

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