

Anti-fat bias may be equally prevalent in general public and medical community

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Medical doctors are as biased against obesity as the general public is, according to a study published Nov. 7 in the open access journal *PLoS ONE* by Janice Sabin from the University of Washington, Seattle, and colleagues from the University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA.

The research tested the anti-fat [biases](#) of nearly 400,000 participants, over 2000 of who were MDs. All the participants, including the MDs, reported a strong preference for thin people rather than fat people in a web-based test that measures both implicit and explicit anti-fat bias. [Implicit attitudes](#) about weight were strong in both male and female MDs, but female MDs had a significantly weaker implicit anti-fat bias than males. MDs who were underweight, normal or overweight had a strong anti-fat bias, whereas MDs who were obese themselves had a moderate bias. The authors also found a significant difference in the strength of self-reported anti-fat attitudes between MDs of different weight groups (underweight, normal or overweight vs. obese and normal vs. overweight)

According to the authors, this is the first study to show that the strong anti-fat bias prevalent in the general public is also shared by many doctors. They say, "We found that MDs' implicit and explicit attitudes about weight follow the same general pattern seen in the very large public samples that hold strong implicit and explicit anti-fat bias."

Whether there is an association between these attitudes about weight and patient reports of [weight discrimination](#) in quality of health care, though, has yet to be studied.

The study concludes, "We do not yet know how MDs anti-fat attitudes affect clinical behavior, nor do we know whether implicit weight bias is related to how [overweight patients](#) experience health care interactions."

Lead author Sabin adds, "It is not surprising that

implicit and explicit weight bias exists among doctors, similar to the general population. It is important for physicians to be aware that this bias exists and to ensure that personal bias does not have a negative impact on the doctor-patient relationship."

More information: Sabin JA, Marini M, Nosek BA (2012) Implicit and Explicit Anti-Fat Bias among a Large Sample of Medical Doctors by BMI, Race/Ethnicity and Gender. *PLoS ONE* 7(11): e48448. [doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0048448](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0048448)

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