

Men may experience weight stigma as much as women

24 April 2018, by Daniel P. Jones



A new study by the UConn Rudd Center finds that a significant portion of adult American men report being mistreated about their weight. Credit: UConn Rudd Center Photo

A new study by the Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity at the University of Connecticut finds that a significant portion of adult American men report being mistreated about their weight. The findings suggest that men may be experiencing weight stigma at rates similar to women.

Negative biases against people with [obesity](#) are widespread, and can contribute to physical and [emotional health problems](#). Previous studies of weight stigma have often focused on women, and indicate that women experience weight stigma more than men.

Recent evidence, however, suggests the gap between men and women in experiencing weight stigma may be smaller than previously thought. Yet little research has been conducted on weight stigma in men exclusively – until now.

"Given the popular notion that concerns about body weight and weight stigma are primarily

'women's issues,' our study highlights the importance of recognizing weight stigma as a problem that both men and women experience," says Mary Himmelstein, a UConn Rudd Center postdoctoral fellow and lead author of the study.

The study, published today in the journal *Obesity*, is the first comprehensive analysis of weight stigma in men exclusively. The research involved three groups of men: 1,244 men from a diverse national survey panel; 233 men from a national online data collection service; and 36 male members of the Obesity Action Coalition who have struggled with their weight.

The 1,513 participants completed online surveys between July 2015 and October 2016. In all three samples, men answered questions about their demographic characteristics, weight status and dieting behavior, and history of experiencing weight stigma.

Key findings of the new study include:

- About 40 percent of men across all three samples reported experiencing weight stigma.
- Men who reported experiencing stigma were younger, less likely to be married, more likely to have obesity, and more likely to have tried to lose weight in the past year.
- Weight stigma occurred most often in adolescence and childhood, most commonly in the form of being verbally mistreated or teased about their weight. Peers, family members, and strangers were the most common sources of this mistreatment.

Unlike women, who tend to experience more weight stigma as their body weight increases, men in this study reported experiencing the greatest stigma at [body mass index](#) (BMI) levels consistent with being underweight or having obesity, relative to normal

weight and overweight.

"Our study shows that men should be included in studies of weight stigma as a vulnerable population instead of simply a comparison group to [women](#)," Himmelstein said. "Given that most men reporting weight stigma in our study were actively trying to lose weight, our findings indicate there may be opportunities for supportive interventions to help men cope with weight [stigma](#) as part of weight management or [weight](#) loss programs."

More information: Mary S. Himmelstein et al. Weight Stigma in Men: What, When, and by Whom?, *Obesity* (2018). DOI: [10.1002/oby.22162](https://doi.org/10.1002/oby.22162)

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