Fat shaming can have much worse impact on mental and physical health than racism or sexism

- Discrimination related to appearance has greater negative impact
- Reported lower life satisfaction and physical health
- Prejudice against more stable characteristics such as gender had no measurable impact

By Katy Winter

Published: 07:07 EST, 9 May 2014 | Updated: 07:10 EST, 9 May 2014

The idolisation of the ‘perfect’- usually ultra slim – body is rife within modern society, and running concurrently is a worrying trend of discrimination against those who are overweight.

Known as ‘fat shaming’ it is easy to see how having an opinion on someone's physical appearance can have immediate effects but alongside emotional hurt and a sense of being ostracised, it seems this kind of discrimination may cause serious long term damage.

It has a more profound negative impact on both physical and psychological health than prejudice against more fixed characteristics such as gender and race.
Though obviously hugely harmful, sexism and racism were found to be largely unrelated to declines in physical and emotional health in the study, which investigated 6,000 adults.

In contrast, researchers at the Florida State University College of Medicine found that discrimination against things that could be thought of as malleable or changeable such as weight did cause considerably greater decline in both physical and emotional health when compared to those who reported no discrimination.

They reported poor subjective health, greater disease burden, lower life satisfaction, and greater loneliness.

Though the study did not explore why such a difference exists, it may be that people are more vulnerable to the negative affects of prejudice if they feel at some level they could change or alter what is being targeted, or did not always have it (ie, they had previously weighed less).
Discrimination based on aspects of appearance such as weight has a more profound negative impact than prejudice against more fixed characteristics such as sexism (right).

Lead author of the study, which is published in Science Daily, Angelina Sutin said: ‘Our previous research showed that perceived discrimination based on body weight was associated with risk of obesity.

'We wanted to see whether this association extended to other health indicators and types of discrimination. What we found was unexpected and striking.'

‘We know how harmful discrimination based race and sex can be, so we were surprised that perceived discrimination based on more malleable characteristics like age and weight had a more pervasive effect on health than discrimination based on these more fixed characteristics.’

Read more:

- Perceived age, weight discrimination worse for health than perceived racism, sexism