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Weight Discrimination Linked to Higher Mortality Risk

Kristina Brooks Editor October 26, 2015



People who frequently encounter weight discrimination, are more likely to remain obese, be less satisfied with life, and develop other chronic health issues.

It's a bleak reality, and now, two researchers from Florida State University have found that weight discrimination also increases mortality risk. The catch is that the increased risk isn't due to physical issues related to weight, but rather the psychological stress of dealing with discrimination.

The researchers noted that the psychological effects from weight discrimination stress is similar across the board, regardless of different BMI values. No matter whether a person is slightly overweight, struggling with weight, or suffering from obesity, stress caused by weight discrimination affects them all in the same negative way, according to the research.

For the [Florida State study](#), data was collected for more than 18,000 people who had all participated in separate longitudinal studies. The first, a University of Michigan Health and Retirement Study, began in 1992, and the other in 1995 (Midlife in the United States Study). Researchers used this data to compare results between those who had experienced weight discrimination and those that did not. They factored in other possible causes for increased mortality such as BMI, overall subjective health, depressive symptoms, smoking habits and physical activity.

Even accounting for these factors, they found that those who suffered from weight discrimination had a 60 percent higher chance of death than the others. These results were consistent between the two groups, even though the data was from two different studies.

The researchers say their findings help highlight both the immediate effect of weight bias and its long-term consequences.

The researchers also noted that this data contrasts with prior research suggesting

suggests repeated weight shaming has a motivating effect for overweight people.

It's this same school of thought that fuels reactions such the viral "Dear Fat People" video by Canadian comedian Nicole Arbour. As seen in the video, weight critics often argue that rude comments or discrimination are just "being real" or "telling the truth," and are expressed to motivate people into losing weight.

But the Florida State study found that instead, weight discrimination and critical weight comments can make a person shut down emotionally. The **researchers pointed out the psychological stress that follows discrimination leads to increased unhealthy eating habits and avoiding physical activity - both contributing to a higher chance of early mortality.**

Not that weight discrimination is always meant to be harmful, mean-spirited, or even a conscious decision. Still, this research shows that discrimination based on someone's weight is an experience that can greatly affect a person's life.

So if we're truly 'being real,' we all have to start admitting that weight bullying and bias are a completely different story and anything but motivating for the person experiencing it.

The study was published in *Psychological Science*.