

Weight Discrimination Puts Individuals at Risk of Increasing Levels of Obesity, Study Finds

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Rather than acting as a motivating factor to lose weight, discrimination based on a person's BMI may actually increase an obese person's risk of gaining even more of it, a study published in the journal *PLOSE ONE* found.

Conducted by researchers from the Florida State University College of Medicine, the report compared the height and weight of over 6,000 participants in 2006 and 2010. In doing so, they found that those who reported experiencing weight discrimination early on were 2.5 times more likely to become obese by the follow-up assessment four years later.

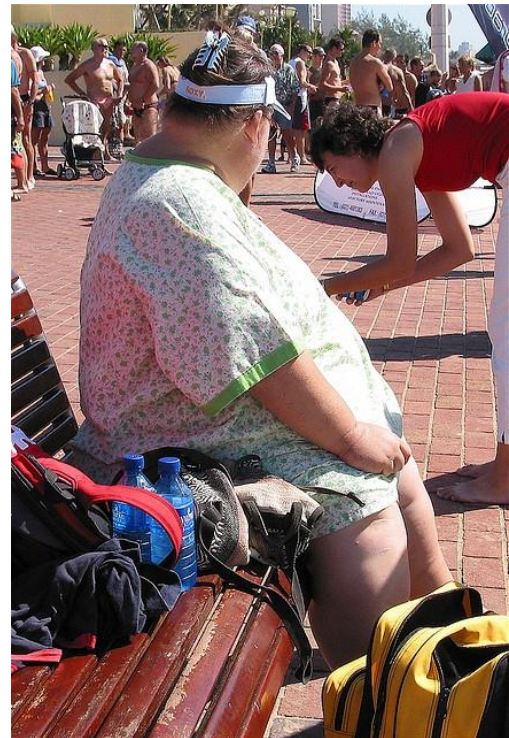
This was true, the scientists found, regardless of any other demographic factors, such as age, gender, ethnicity or education.

Based on their data, the researchers conclude that "weightism" has further implications for obesity than poor mental health alone.

"In addition to the well-known emotional and economic costs, our results suggest that weight discrimination also increases risk of obesity," co-author Angelina Sutin said in a press release. "This could lead to a vicious cycle where individuals who are overweight and obese are more vulnerable to weight discrimination, and this discrimination may contribute to subsequent obesity and difficulties with weight management."

Poignantly, one of the best documented examples of weight discrimination is that carried out by physicians themselves.

In a study published in the journal *Obesity*, researchers from John Hopkins School of Medicine looked at 39 primary care doctors and 208 of their patients, comparing the latter's BMI with the physicians' ability to show empathy as defined by their use of reassuring and validating phrases.



While the study did not find a difference in the quantity of physicians' medical questions, advice, counseling or treatment discussions, it did find a lack of emotional rapport in the case of obese and overweight patients versus those who were not.

This, Dr. Kimberly A. Gudzone, the lead researcher of this second study, can be problematic for a number of reasons.

"If patients see their primary care doctors as allies, I think they will be more successful in complying with our advice," Gudzone said. "I hear from patients all the time about how they resent feeling judged negatively because of their weight. Yes, doctors need to be medical advisers, but they also have the opportunity to be advocates to support their patients through changes in their lives."