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Multiple Approaches Needed to Combat Societal Weight Stigma, According to Women

Perspectives of Women With Obesity Provide Insights to Prioritize Strategies

Hartford, Conn. – Societal stigma of individuals with overweight and obesity is well established, but few remedies have been implemented to address this problem. Women with obesity who were asked their views about strategies to reduce weight stigma in our society say that interventions in the workplace, schools, and healthcare should be prioritized, according to a study by the Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity at the University of Connecticut.

This new study, published today in [Obesity Science & Practice](#), examined the perspectives of 461 women with overweight and obesity (most who had experienced weight stigma) about a broad range of potential stigma-reduction strategies. The women are members of the Obesity Action Coalition (OAC), a national non-profit group of 54,000 members who support individuals affected by obesity through education and advocacy.

Most participants in the study (76 percent to 95 percent) assigned high importance to 31 of 35 weight stigma-reduction strategies, with school-based and healthcare approaches receiving the highest ratings. Providing education about weight stigma in existing anti-harassment training in the workplace was rated as the most impactful and feasible strategy. The family setting also was viewed as an important target for stigma reduction, with family members identified by 86 percent of participants as playing a major role in efforts to reduce weight stigma.

“The broad support expressed for multiple strategies across diverse settings suggests that individuals with these stigmatized identities view a need for comprehensive approaches to effectively reduce weight stigma,” said Rebecca Puhl, Deputy Director of the UConn Rudd Center and lead author of the study.

Specific findings of the study show:

- 95 percent of participants assigned high importance to training school staff on strategies to address weight-related bullying in youth. Previous research

by Dr. Puhl has shown that weight-based bullying is one of the most common forms of bullying in youth.

- 95 percent assigned high importance to schools' adopting anti-bullying policies to protect students from weight-based bullying.
- More than 94 percent placed high importance on implementing comprehensive education about obesity in medical schools, and training for healthcare providers to give respectful, compassionate care to patients with obesity.
- More than 94 percent assigned high importance to providing parents with access to resources to support .
- More than 85 percent assigned high importance to legislative remedies, including strengthening state anti-bullying laws to include protections for youth against weight bullying, and adopting laws to make it illegal for employers to discriminate against employees because of body weight.

"These findings underscore the importance of including people who have been impacted by stigma in research and advocacy," said Joe Nadglowski, President and Chief Executive Officer of the OAC.

To date, perspectives of individuals who have been stigmatized about their weight have often been absent in research aiming to reduce this stigma, Dr. Puhl said. "Their insights provide a necessary and valuable contribution that can inform ways to reduce weight-based inequities and prioritize such efforts."

The study was funded by a grant from the Rudd Foundation. Other study authors include Mary Himmelstein of the UConn Rudd Center, Amy Gorin of the Institute for Collaboration on Health, Intervention, and Policy (InCHIP) at UConn, and Young Suh, of the University of Massachusetts Medical School.

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About the UConn Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity

The Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity at the University of Connecticut is a distinguished multi-disciplinary policy research center dedicated to promoting solutions to childhood obesity, poor diet, and weight bias through research and policy. The Rudd Center is a leader in building broad-based consensus to change diet and activity patterns by conducting research and educating policy makers and the public. For more information, visit www.uconnruddcenter.org or follow us on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/uconnruddcenter](https://twitter.com/uconnruddcenter) or on Facebook at www.facebook.com/uconnruddcenter.