

Effectiveness of a Health Promotion Stand at a UK University to Raise Awareness on Obesity-related Weight Bias and Stigma: A Pilot Study

Introduction Weight bias leads to the stigmatisation of individuals with obesity and has been associated with exacerbating psychological and physiological stress as well as further weight gain. As such, there is a need for interventions to effectively address weight bias and stigma-reduction

Aim The aim of this observational study was to evaluate the understanding of obesity-related weight bias and stigma amongst university students and staff.

Method A health promotion stand was set up in Ulster University on World Obesity Day 2020. Students and staff who engaged were presented with definitions of weight bias and stigma, associated consequences and the importance of person-first-language. Subsequently they were asked to translate the new knowledge into practical suggestions or advice to help combat weight bias/stigma. They were also given the option to sign a pledge to ameliorate weight bias/stigma. All suggestions were categorised into common sub-groups as shown in Table 1.

Results 101 students and staff pledged their support and 83 gave a suggestion to minimise weight bias/stigma. In the latter group, the majority (71%) had a sound understanding of weight bias and stigma. However, 24 participants (29%) appeared to have confused the body acceptance initiative with reducing weight bias and stigma (Table 1). This was further verified through their interaction and comments with the volunteers at the stall.

Table 1: Suggestions to minimise weight bias and stigma (n=83)

Comments relevant to minimising weight bias & stigma	n=59 (71%)
Treat individuals with obesity with respect & kindness. Show empathy	38 (64%)
Use "Person-first Language"	11 (19%)
Promote education regarding consequences of weight bias/stigma	2 (3%)
Judge less & understand obesity is a complex disease that requires various forms of treatment	7 (12%)
Find a balance between "body confidence & glorifying a disease"	1 (2%)
Comments related to body acceptance initiative	n=24 (29%)
"Love your body"	14 (58%)
"Accept that everyone comes in different sizes"	10 (42%)

Conclusion This pilot evaluation provides empirical evidence that "minimising weight bias/stigma" and the "body acceptance initiative" may be easily confused and even addressed interchangeably. Education initiatives to distinguish between these concepts is warranted to reduce weight-related stigma and improve access to care for individuals with obesity.

References

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