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Apr 6th, 2:09 PM - 2:20 PM

Prevalence of perceived weight stigma and its psychological impact on obese people in Saudi Arabia

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Albalawi, Wafi, "Prevalence of perceived weight stigma and its psychological impact on obese people in Saudi Arabia" (2022). *OHSU-PSU School of Public Health Annual Conference*. 18.

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Prevalence of perceived weight stigma and discrimination and its psychological impact on obese people in Saudi Arabia

Abstract

Background: Overweight and obese persons are vulnerable to frequent stigmatization and discrimination because of their weight, an issue that is barely discussed and receives very little attention in public health interventions and medical literature. Weight stigma is the negative attitude toward people who are perceived to have weight excess. The sources of weight stigmatization toward obese persons have been identified in the literature and included multiple sources such as negative stereotypes and prejudice endorsed by employers, health care providers, educators, peers, family members, and the media. In Saudi Arabia, the prevalence of obesity is 36%. However, despite the high rate of obesity, no data is available on the prevalence of perceived weight stigma among obese people in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, the study aims to (a) determine the prevalence of perceived weight discrimination among obese people, (b) identify the major sources of stigma, and (c) determine the psychological impact of perceived weight discrimination on obese people in Saudi Arabian.

Method: We conducted a cross-sectional study on 544 obese people (BMI of 30 or greater) from across the kingdom of Saudi Arabia (north region, south region, west region, east region, and central region). Data was collected using an electronic-based questionnaire distributed online (e.g., social media, email, phone calls). We collected demographic information, including age, gender, income, education, employment status, the region where they currently live, marital status, and height and weight. We used the Stigmatizing Situations Inventory Scale (SSI) and Perceived Stress Scale to determine perceived weight stigma, sources of stigma, and psychological impact. We conducted descriptive statistics analysis using SPSS.

Result: Most of the participants reported that they had experienced weight stigma at least once in their lives. The most reported sources of stigma, respectively, %80.9 reported that they had experienced weight stigma in public transportation, %74.6 said they had experienced Children loudly making comments about their weight to others, %73.7 have had family members feel embarrassed or ashamed of them because of their weight, %69.3 being stared at in public, %62.6 being singled out as a child by a teacher, school nurse, etc., because of their weight. The majority of participants have reported high perceived stress.

Conclusion: This is the first study investigating perceived weight stigma among obese people in Saudi Arabia. The finding of this study indicates a high prevalence of weight stigma in Saudi Arabia. The results of this study coincide with the findings of other studies conducted in other countries.