

TITLE: The Intersection of Weight Stigma Trauma and Public Health

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STUDENT SUBMISSION: Yes

TOPIC/TARGET AUDIENCE: Policy makers, program developers and evaluators, researchers, health care professionals

ABSTRACT: Early life experiences of weight stigma (WS) are known to negatively affect psychological well-being. Public health initiatives historically reinforce WS by emphasizing the importance of weight status and positioning it as a central marker of good health. The purpose of this study was to understand life-history experiences of WS and its bearing on mental health. Critical hermeneutics, Fat Studies, and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology underpinned the development of interview guides. Seventeen participants from across the U.S. completed two narrative life-history interviews. Multiple analytic procedures were used including in-vivo and line-by-line coding cycles. Story maps depicting life experiences were constructed and verified with participants. A matrix analysis was used to identify patterns of life experiences and organized into thematic categories. Participants experienced four sources of WS in early life: direct comments from family; weight bullying from peers; stigmatizing healthcare encounters; and indirect comments from parents about their weight. Early life experiences of WS affected the ways participants learned and felt about their bodies and their socialization within and outside of their families. WS led participants to develop depression and disordered eating patterns. Public health initiatives should be critically evaluated for evidence of WS and adopt weight neutral approaches aimed at encouraging health behaviors.

OBJECTIVE(S): Describe four sources of weight stigma present in everyday interactions Discuss how public health can be used interrupt weight stigma and encourage engagement in health behaviors
