

'Tough love' no good for obesity interventions

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Obese people support lifestyle-change interventions, rather than those that purely promote weight loss. Researchers writing in BioMed Central's open access journal *BMC Public Health* interviewed 142 obese people about their opinions on interventions ranging from gastric bands to legal regulation, finding that non-commercial, non-stigmatizing techniques were preferred.

Dr Samantha Thomas, from Monash University, Melbourne, Australia, worked with a team of researchers to conduct the semi-structured telephone interviews. She said, "This study provides a number of new insights into how and why [obese individuals](#) support and uptake different interventions. Importantly, participants supported [public health](#) interventions which they perceived were non-judgmental, non-stigmatizing and empowered individuals to improve their lifestyles rather than focusing on weight loss per se. Participants in this study were less likely to view interventions as effective if they thought they were stigmatizing, or blamed and shamed individuals for being overweight".

The researchers asked people how they felt about government regulation, large-scale public health initiatives, media campaigns, personalised fitness programmes, gastric banding surgery and commercial diet groups. None of the interventions were supported by more than two thirds of the participants. Commercial dieting and media campaigns were perceived particularly badly, particularly the use of 'scare tactics' to encourage [weight loss](#). The dieting industry was seen as "greedy", "a scam" and "a rip-off" but, according to Thomas, "Ironically, many

participants still said that they would turn to commercial dieting to help lose weight and improve their health. This was because they had very little other support available to them. There is a need for greater attention to be dedicated to interventions that support and empower individuals to improve their lifestyle. At the individual level, personalised care planning and long term support systems must be developed to assist obese individuals. At the population level, anti-stigma campaigns and regulation should both be explored".

More information: "The solution needs to be complex". Obese adults' attitudes about the effectiveness of individual and population based interventions for obesity. Samantha L Thomas, Sophie Lewis, Jim Hyde, David Castle and Paul Komesaroff, BMC Public Health (in press), www.biomedcentral.com/bmcpublichealth/

Provided by BioMed Central

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