

Obesity affects job prospects for women, study finds

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Obese women are more likely to be discriminated against when applying for jobs and receive lower starting salaries than their non-overweight colleagues, a new study has found.

The study, led by The University of Manchester and Monash University, Melbourne, and published in the [International Journal of Obesity](#), examined whether a recently developed measure of anti-fat prejudice, the universal measure of bias (UMB), predicted actual obesity job discrimination. The researchers also assessed whether people's insecurity with their own bodies (body image) and conservative personalities such as, authoritarianism, and [social dominance](#) orientation were related to obesity discrimination, as they are related to homophobia and racism.

Psychologist and lead researcher Dr Kerry O'Brien said the nature of the study was initially concealed from the participants to avoid biased results, and simply advertised as a study on whether some people are better at personnel selection than others.

"Participants viewed a series of resumes that had a small photo of the job applicant attached, and were asked to make ratings of the applicants suitability, starting salary, and employability," said Dr O'Brien. "We used pictures of women pre- and post-bariatric surgery, and varied whether participants saw either a resume, amongst many, that had a picture of an obese female (BMI 38-41) attached, or the same female but in a normal weight range (BMI 22-24) following bariatric surgery.

"We found that strong obesity discrimination was displayed across all job selection criteria, such as starting salary, leadership potential, and likelihood of selecting an obese candidate for the job."

The higher a participant's score on the measure of anti-fat prejudice, the more likely they were to discriminate against obese candidates, while those with a more authoritarian personality also displayed discrimination.

Dr O'Brien and co-authors Dr Janet Latner, from the University of Hawaii, and Dr Jackie Hunter, from Otago University, noted that one of the particularly interesting and new findings was that the participants' ratings of their own physical appearance (body image) and importance of physical appearance were also associated with obesity discrimination.

"The higher participants rated their own physical attractiveness and the importance of physical appearance, the greater the prejudice and discrimination," said Dr O'Brien. "One interpretation of this finding might be that we feel better about our own bodies if we compare ourselves and discriminate against 'fat' people, but we need to test this experimentally."

The study is the first to show a relationship between explicit self-report measures of obesity prejudice and obesity job discrimination. In addition, the results suggest that a belief in the superiority of some individuals over others is related to the perception that obese individuals deserve fewer privileges and opportunities than non-fat individuals.

Dr O'Brien added: "Our findings show that there is a clear need to address [obesity](#) discrimination, particularly against females who tend to bear the brunt of anti-fat prejudice. Prejudice reduction interventions and policies need to be developed. It's also becoming clear that the reasons for this prejudice appear to be related to our personalities, how

we feel about ourselves, with attributions, such as, obese people are lazy, gluttonous etc merely acting as justifications for our prejudice."

Provided by University of Manchester

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