

Body weight and gender influence judgment in the courtroom

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(Medical Xpress)—In a study that offers insight into the depth of stigmatization of overweight and obese people, researchers at the Yale Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity found that weight stigma extends to the courtroom. Published online in the *International Journal of Obesity*, the study shows that a defendant's body weight and gender impact jurors' perceptions of guilt and responsibility.

Researchers conducted an online study with 471 adult participants. They were presented with a mock court case, including images of alleged

defendants. Participants viewed one of four defendant images: a lean male, a lean female, an obese male, and an obese female. After viewing the image, participants were then asked to rate how guilty they thought the defendant was.

Male participants rated the obese female defendant guiltier than the lean female defendant, whereas female respondents judged the two female defendants equally regardless of [weight](#). Among all participants, there were no differences in assessment of guilt between the obese male and lean male defendants.

Only the obese female defendant was penalized for her weight, a finding that is consistent with research published in the past 20 years that shows obese females face more weight-related stigma than obese males.

"According to research previously conducted at the Rudd Center, the prevalence of weight-based [stigmatization](#) is now on par with rates of racial discrimination, and has been documented across multiple domains, including employment, medical, and interpersonal settings," said Natasha Schvey, lead author of the study. "The present study identifies yet another setting in which obese persons are vulnerable to bias and discrimination."

The authors say that these findings demonstrate the depth of weight stigma and a crucial need to extend weight bias reduction efforts to the legal setting.

Provided by Yale University

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