

Are 'food addicts' stigmatized?

February 6 2013, by Megan Orciari

(Medical Xpress)—In the first studies to examine what the public thinks about people with an addiction to food, researchers at the Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity at Yale found that while this addiction is less vulnerable to public stigma than others, it could increase the stigma already associated with obesity. The studies are published online in the journal *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*.

The notion of food [addiction](#) has gained increased attention from academics, health care professionals, and mainstream media as a contributing factor to obesity. However, little research has been done on public perceptions.

First, researchers conducted an online survey of 659 adults. Participants were provided with different labels describing individuals with various health conditions and addictions, including obesity, food addiction, physical disability, mental illness, cocaine addiction, and smoking. Participants were asked questions regarding their beliefs and feelings toward an individual with each of these different conditions. In a second study, researchers conducted an experiment where 570 adults were randomly assigned to view only one addiction—either smoking, alcohol, or food addiction—to specifically compare public perceptions of individuals described as being addicted to food to those with smoking or alcohol addictions.

Findings from both studies revealed that food addiction was viewed more favorably compared to other addictions. For example, attitudes toward food addiction were more forgiving and less stigmatizing than

attitudes toward addiction to alcohol and tobacco. The person with the "food addict" label was perceived to be more likeable and generated more empathy, less disgust, and less anger than those labeled with alcohol and tobacco addictions. The person with the "food addict" label was blamed less for the addiction compared to those labeled with smoking and alcohol addictions.

However, survey findings also showed that labeling an individual as a "food addict" increased stigmatizing attitudes when this label was applied to an obese individual. Participants expressed more irritation, anger, and disgust toward an obese person described as a food addict. The authors suggest that the "food addict" label could increase blame toward obese individuals if the public views food addiction as a euphemism for out-of-control overeating.

"Our findings offer preliminary insights into how food addiction is perceived among other health conditions and how it affects public attitudes toward obesity," according to Rebecca Puhl, the Rudd Center's director for research and weight stigma initiatives.

As discussions about [food addiction](#) continue to surface in public health and popular culture, the authors assert, more research is needed to understand how the use of a "[food](#) addict" label may influence public views and reactions.

The full study can be found [online](#).

Provided by Yale University

Citation: Are 'food addicts' stigmatized? (2013, February 6) retrieved 9 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-02-food-addicts-stigmatized.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.