

Overweight, obese mothers treated differently by health professionals, study finds

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(Medical Xpress)—Queensland mums-to-be who are considered to be overweight or obese are treated and perceived more poorly by maternity care providers because of their body weight, according to a new University of Queensland study.

Research conducted by UQ's Queensland Centre for Mothers and Babies (QCMB) investigated weight stigma in [maternity care](#) settings, from the perspectives of women receiving care and the health professionals who provide it.

QCMB's Dr Yvette Miller said the study found women who had a higher [Body Mass Index](#) (BMI) in pregnancy reported instances of negative treatment from maternity care providers.

"These women were more likely to report negative care experiences during their pregnancy and after their birth, such as not being treated with respect, kindness and understanding, care providers not being open and honest, and not genuinely caring for their well-being," Dr Miller said.

Dr Miller said it was not just that women with larger bodies were more sensitive to discriminatory treatment or perceived their treatment differently, as [health professionals](#) also treated them differently.

"Professionals with training in both the medical and midwifery fields across Australia responded differently to fictional case presentations of a pregnant patient, depending on whether they had a normal-weight, [overweight](#) or obese BMI, although nothing else about the patient was different," she said.

"Professionals held less [positive attitudes](#) towards caring for overweight or obese [pregnant women](#), compared to normal weight pregnant women. Attitudes such as being annoyed by the patient, feeling as though seeing the patient was a waste of their time, and having less patience or a personal desire to help and support them.

"They also perceived overweight and obese pregnant women as less likely to be healthy, to take care of themselves and to be self-disciplined, even though all other health indicators for the fictional patients were exactly the same."

Dr Miller said these results provided strong preliminary evidence that weight stigma was present in maternity care settings in Queensland, especially given the researchers investigated both women's and future care providers' perspectives.

"We need to develop strategies to recognise and combat weight stigma when we are training our maternity care professionals," she said.

"People who are subjected to these kind of discriminatory behaviors and attitudes are more likely to delay medical appointments and preventive healthcare procedures, to binge eat and avoid exercise, and to have poorer psychological health."

The research, titled "Weight [stigma](#) in maternity care: [women's](#) experiences and care providers' attitudes," has been published in the journal *BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth*.

More information: www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2393/13/19

Provided by University of Queensland

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