

# Both public and experts support strategies to fight eating disorders, weight stigma

June 3 2014, by Megan Orciari

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(Medical Xpress)—Despite the prevalence and health consequences of eating disorders and weight-related bullying and discrimination, policy actions to address these problems are currently limited. However, there is significant support among American adults and experts in eating disorders for a range of policy initiatives to address these issues, according to a study led by the Yale Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity. The study is published online in *BMC Public Health*.

Researchers surveyed 944 American adults and 1,420 members of

professional organizations that specialize in [eating disorders](#).

Researchers examined support in both groups for 23 potential policy strategies that would help prevent and reduce eating disorders and weight stigma in diverse settings, including schools, healthcare, and the media. Participants also rated policy initiatives according to how much impact they thought the policies would have and how feasible they were to implement.

Among the American adults, the majority of participants expressed support for 20 out of the 23 policy actions, with the most support (83%) for anti-bullying policies that protect youth from weight-based bullying. Also getting significant support were policies to implement prevention and training programs for the early identification of eating disorders among health care providers (79%), schools (77%), and sports coaches (71%).

Among experts from the eating disorders field, more than two-thirds of participants expressed support for 21 out of the 23 policy actions. This group was highly supportive of policy actions to address eating disorders in schools (95%), health care settings (99%), and the media (90%), as well as policy and legal measures to address weight-based bullying and discrimination (74%-94%).

Policies generating the least public support among both participant groups were those requiring schools to measure and report students' body weight.

Policy measures aiming to address and prevent eating disorders and weight stigma among youth in the school setting were selected by the majority of participants as having the highest potential impact and feasibility. The authors assert that with increasing national attention to both youth bullying and to improving standards for nutrition and wellness in schools, there may be realistic and timely opportunities to

implement such policies into school-based wellness and anti-bullying policies.

"These findings suggest that there is consensus about the socio-cultural forces in our environment that contribute to eating disorders and weight stigmatization, and the need for both health and social [policy](#) measures to address aspects of our environment that contribute to these problems," said lead author Rebecca Puhl, deputy director of the Rudd Center.

Provided by Yale University

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