

Obesity associated with poorer mental health, especially in women

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A trio of mental and physical health researchers with University College Cork's School of Public Health, has found evidence of poorer mental health in middle-aged to older people with obesity, independent of disease and lifestyle factors.

In their [paper](#) published on the open-access site *PLOS ONE*, Caoimhe Lonergan, Sean Millar, and Zubair Kabi, describe how they analyzed [health data](#) for more than 1,800 adult volunteers comparing BMI scores and mental health scores.

Prior research and anecdotal evidence have suggested a link between obesity and depression, but few studies have looked at the connection between the two using hard evidence from older people. For this new study, the research trio asked volunteers at a primary care center to participate in an obesity study.

As part of the study, each of the 1,821 volunteers (ages 46 to 73) gave permission and access to their [medical records](#), and they also fasted overnight before providing [blood samples](#), which were tested for glycated hemoglobin and glucose levels. Each was also measured for weight, height, and the circumference of their waist, which was used to calculate BMI. Each volunteer also filled out forms that described their lifestyle, demographics, and other health or disease factors.

In analyzing the data, and factoring out [lifestyle factors](#), the researchers found what they describe as an association between BMI/body measurements consistent with obesity and depression along with feelings of low well-being. They noted that such relationships were more common for the women in the study than for the men. They also noted that their findings were consistent with those found in other similar research efforts.

The research team suggests that poorer mental health in obese [older people](#) is likely tied to social and physical factors, noting that there is [social stigma](#), prejudice and sometimes discrimination associated with people suffering from obesity. They noted also that a number of studies have shown that there are many health problems associated with obesity, from joint and back pain to cardiovascular disease to fibromyalgia.

They suggest the combination of frustrations faced by obese people likely contributes to poor mental health. They conclude by suggesting that targeted interventions by health professionals should include weight management assistance.

More information: Caoimhe Lonergan et al, Associations between adiposity measures and depression and well-being scores: A cross-sectional analysis of middle- to older-aged adults, *PLOS ONE* (2024). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0299029](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0299029)

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