



# **Weight Stigma in the UK: implications for policy and practice**

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Open Access

# UK adults' implicit and explicit attitudes towards obesity: a cross-sectional study

Stuart W. Flint<sup>1,2\*</sup>, Joanne Hudson<sup>3</sup> and David Lavallee<sup>4</sup>



- 2380 participants aged 18-65 years.
- Questionnaires and response latency measure.
  - Younger participants reported more negative attitudes and participants.
  - Males reported stronger anti-fat attitudes than females.
  - Participants of all BMI index groups have demonstrated negative attitudes and beliefs about obesity.



# Call to action on obesity

In 2011, Andrew Lansley, the Secretary of State for Health, said:

“We need to be honest with ourselves and recognise that we need to make some changes to control our weight.

Increasing physical activity is important but, for most of us who are overweight and obese, eating and drinking less is key to weight loss.”

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## Cost of obesity, drug abuse and alcoholism to be revealed

Drain on the economy of obese people, drug addicts and alcoholics will be calculated under plans to be announced by David Cameron

 HM Government



Healthy Lives,  
Healthy People:

A call to action on obesity in England

# Stigmatising images



HuffPostUK, 2016



BBC, 2016



The Telegraph, 2015



World Health Organisation, 2017

# Development of weight stigma



## Media

- Fat jokes and derogatory portrayals are popular in common media (Puhl & Brownell, 2001; Flint et al., 2016).
- Acceptable to stigmatise body sizes (Heuer et al., 2011).

One newspaper article uses the title **“the fattest boy in the world weighs 16st aged 7”**. This article begins by posing the question **“think British kids are getting a bit porky? Then take a look at this Russian tank”**. Within the report comparisons are made between the boy’s weight and a baby elephant.

(Iggulden, 2007, p.32-33)

# Media portrayal of obesity in the UK



Doctopic: Analysis and Interpretation

THELANCETDE-D-18-00013

PII **IN PRESS**

Stigma and Health

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2376-6972/15/\$12.00 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/sah0000013>

## The Portrayal of Obesity in U.K. National Newspapers

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University of Stirling

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**Weight stigma and  
discrimination: a call to  
the media**

and discrimination is  
thus endorse and  
societal beliefs.

It is crucial that the

*“we live in an “obesogenic” society, which means – I think – that our hospitals are full of morbidly obese chavs with kettle chips poking out of their nostrils, their vital organs entombed in gallons of hydrogenated blubber. People who cannot watch X Factor without reaching for the KFC Party Death Bucket; slabs of lard who move only when the remote has fallen down a crack in the sofa” (The Sunday Times).*

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## Nearly HALF of all primary school children are dangerously overweight in parts of Britain, reveals first map to track their bulging waistlines

- Public Health England figures are ranked by local authority for the first time
- Study shows the best and worst areas on record are just five miles apart
- Experts say it proves governments have failed to tackle childhood obesity
- Findings comes after an obese 12-year-old girl was taken from her mother

By CLAUDIA TANNER FOR MAILONLINE

PUBLISHED: 10:53, 29 January 2018 | UPDATED: 21:00, 29 January 2018



180  
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Nearly half of primary school children are dangerously overweight in some parts of the country, according to official figures.

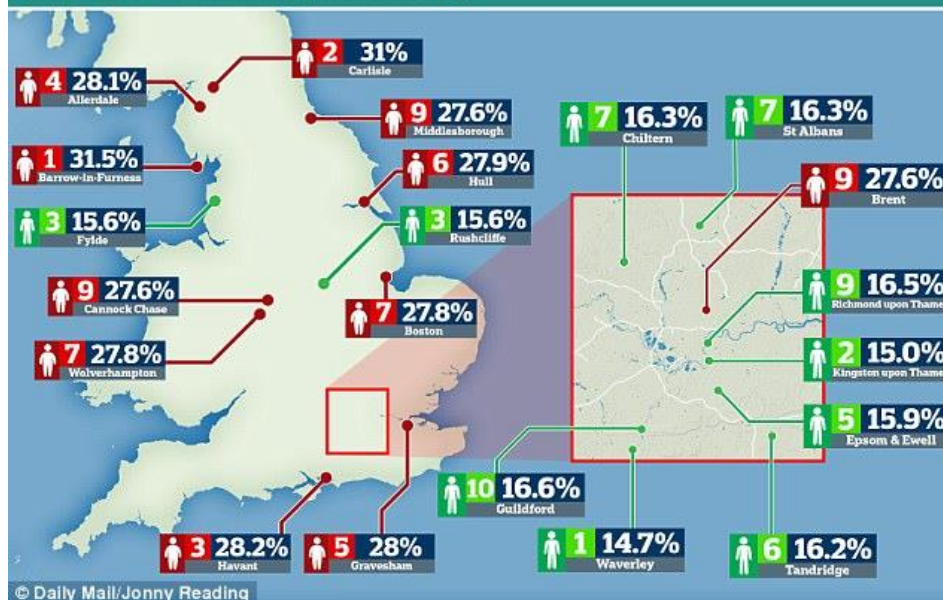
Public Health England has for the first time mapped the waistlines of 10 and 11 year

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### Where are the areas with the fattest children in reception? (% classed as overweight or obese)



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# Man & Boy: Giles Coren "I Don't Care What My Son Becomes... As Long As He Isn't Overweight"

A father's fear

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And I'm worried as fuck that my little Sam could go the same way. Not only because of how it will ruin his life but because of how it will reflect on me. For while obesity as a demographic phenomenon can be classed as disease, epidemic, socio-economic tragedy, whatever, on an individual, case-by-case basis, each actual fat person is blatantly just a badly brought-up, greedy little son of a bitch committing the unforgivable sin of gluttony in a world where there is not enough food to go round. I'd kill them all and render them down for candles.

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My daughter I am less worried about. Possibly because she is as skinny as a cricket. But if at some point in adult life she pulls the ripcord, well, there are uses for a fat woman. She can be kind of cosy. Whereas a fat man has nothing to offer but his ability to consume. To bring forth upon the world a fat son is indeed a shame before God.



# Weight stigma in the UK: implications



- Media messages may be internalized and endorsed as personal beliefs.
- Newspapers show no evidence of condemning anti-fat attitudes and behaviours directed towards people who are overweight.

## *Failure to adhere to the national journalism societies:*

- Society of Professional Journalists code of ethics, states that journalists should avoid stereotyping and examine the ways in which their values might shape their reporting
- National Union of Journalism code of conduct which emphasizes that we don't produce material likely to lead to hatred or discrimination

# Weight stigma in the UK: implications

## Overweight Haters Ltd

It's really not glandular, it's your gluttony...

Our organisation hates and resents fat people. We object to the enormous amount of food resources you consume while half the world starves. We disapprove of your wasting NHS money to treat your selfish greed. And we do not understand why you fail to grasp that by eating less you will be better off, slimmer, happy and find a partner who is not a perverted chubby-lover, or even find a partner at all.

We also object that the beautiful pig is used as an insult. You are not a pig. You are a fat, ugly human.

# Weight stigma in the UK: implications



*Article*

## **Weight stigma in frequent exercisers: Overt, demeaning and condescending**

**Stuart W Flint<sup>1</sup> and Sophie Reale<sup>2</sup>**



Journal of Health Psychology  
1–10  
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# Weight stigma in the UK: implications



frontiers  
in Psychology

ORIGINAL RESEARCH  
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## Obesity Discrimination in the Recruitment Process: “You’re Not Hired!”

Stuart W. Flint<sup>1,2\*</sup>, Martin Čadež<sup>3</sup>, Sonia C. Codreanu<sup>4</sup>, Vanja Ivić<sup>5</sup>, Colene Zomer<sup>6</sup> and Amalia Gomoiu<sup>7</sup>



Article

## Obesity and discrimination: The next ‘big issue’?

Stuart W Flint<sup>1</sup> and Jeremé Snook<sup>2</sup>

# IJDL

International Journal of  
Discrimination and the Law  
1–11

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ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT (I JANSSEN, SECTION EDITOR)

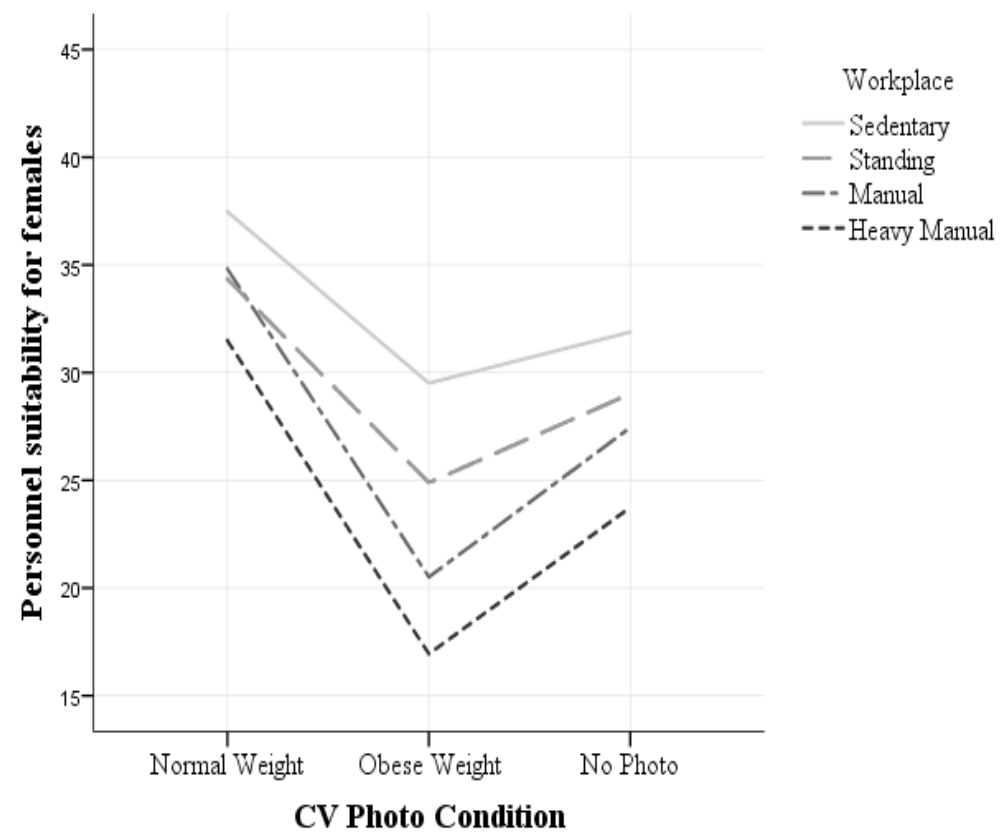
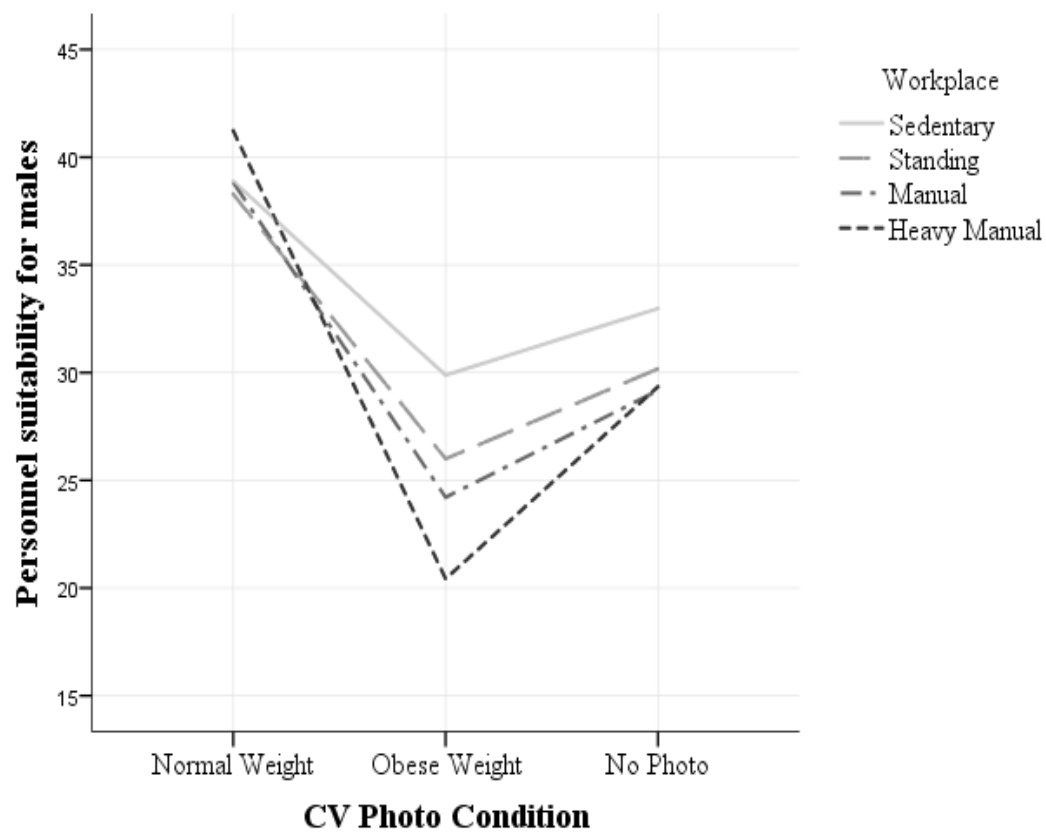
## Disability Discrimination and Obesity: The Big Questions?

Stuart W. Flint<sup>1,2</sup> · Jeremé Snook<sup>3</sup>



## Obesity Discrimination in the Recruitment Process: “You’re Not Hired!”

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# Weight stigma in the UK: implications



Curr Obes Rep  
DOI 10.1007/s13679-013-0070-y

HEALTH SERVICES AND PROGRAMS (SFL KIRK, SECTION EDITOR)

## Weight Bias and the Training of Health Professionals to Better Manage Obesity: What Do We Know and What Should We Do?

Ian Brown • Stuart W. Flint

ARTICLE

## Obesity stigma: Prevalence and impact in healthcare

*Stuart William Flint*



# Weight stigma in the UK: implications

- 23% of physicians failed to recommend treatment to patients with obesity

Current Reviews  
DOI:10.1007/s13679-015-0070-y

HEALTH SERVICES AND PROGRAMS (SFL KIRK, SECTION EDITOR)

- 47% reported that counselling patients regarding weight management was inconvenient

(Price et al., 1987)

**Weight Bias and the Training of Health Professionals**

**to Better Manage Obesity: What Do We Know**

**and What Should We Do?**

Attitudes, intervention approaches and referral procedures

in 1200 physicians (Kristeller & Hoerr, 1997)

Jan Brown, Stuart W. Flint

Physicians failed to:

PRICE

- intervene to the extent that they should
- appeared ambivalent about how to manage patients
- were unlikely to refer individuals to appropriate weight management programmes.

**Obesity stigma: Prevalence and impact in healthcare**

18% reported that they would discuss weight management with patients who were overweight, which only increased to 42% for patients with mild obesity.

Stuart William Flint



Weight bias among UK trainee healthcare professionals (Swift et al., 2012)

Overall, participants stereotyped people who are overweight, with only 1.4% of participants expressed 'positive or neutral attitudes'.

# Healthcare practitioner-patient relationship

## Background

Empirical evidence examining the impact of healthcare professionals' (HCPs) weight status on the practitioner-patient relationship is sparse.

## Participants

237 participants (124 males, 113 female; 26.2 kg.m<sup>2</sup>)

## Measures

- Attitudes Towards Obese Person (**ATOP**; Allison et al., 1991)
- Beliefs About Obese People (**BAOP**; Allison et al., 1991) scales
- Fat Phobia Scale (**F-Scale**; Bacon et al., 2001).
- Attitudes towards healthcare professionals (Puhl et al., 2013):
  - General Advice Adherence, Professional credibility, Selection, Trustworthiness, Compassion, Impression, and Healthy behaviours.





# Public acceptance of weight stigma

Must we really be a nation of fat-shamers?



The Guardian

Sonia Sodha  
3 days ago

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© PA Obesity is the 'last acceptable prejudice', according to campaigners.

Obesity now comes second only to smoking as a cause of [premature death](#) in Europe and North America. It's estimated to cost the NHS around £4bn a year. Yet last week, surgeons lambasted the NHS for severely limiting access to [stomach shrinking surgery](#). There were

# Summary

- Evidence of weight stigma in the UK
- Weight stigma may be internalised – by all people!
- Framing of obesity within the media can exacerbate weight stigma
- Weight stigma can lead to discriminatory behaviours
- Framing of public health policy can exacerbate weight stigma and reduce effectiveness

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