



ASO position paper: Weight bias and stigma

*'Anti-fat attitude', 'weight stigma', 'weight bias' and 'anti-fat prejudice' are terms referred to in the literature that describe a negative attitude toward (dislike of), belief about (stereotype) or behaviour against (discrimination) people perceived as being 'fat.'*¹

There is extensive research highlighting the bias and stigma (including negative attitudes, prejudice or discrimination) people who are overweight or obese may experience. This may be in relation to work, education, health care, social interactions or the media². Healthcare practitioners and academics may also be a source of stigma. The available evidence indicates that weight bias or stigma can be harmful to individuals' wellbeing³.

The Association for the Study of Obesity (ASO) does not believe there is a place for weight bias and is committed to reducing negative attitudes towards people with overweight or obesity in all settings. As such, the ASO encourages members to:

- Use people-first language when describing people who are overweight or obese, both in writing (eg presentation title or abstract), conversation, or in oral presentations. In practice, this means not using terms such as 'obese' or 'overweight' as adjectives. Use phrasing such as 'adults who are overweight or obese' or 'adults with obesity' rather than 'obese adults'.
- Avoid using stigmatising or derogatory images of individuals who are overweight or obese in presentations, written papers and other publications. Authors and presenters should carefully consider whether images are necessary and appropriate.

When discussing, or portraying overweight or obesity at ASO meetings or events, members should avoid:

- Communicating weight-based stereotypes through inappropriate language or imagery.
- Implicitly as well as explicitly blaming individuals, families and groups
- Fat jokes/humour
- Suggesting that a person's body weight implies negative assumptions about their character, intelligence, abilities, etc.
- Implying that a particular population group does not wish to manage their weight
- Implying that all heavier-weight people share the same view (e.g. desire weight loss).

¹ Danielsdottir, S., O'Brien, K.S. & Ciao, A. (2010) Anti-fat prejudice reduction: a review of published studies. *Obes.Facts.* 3, 47-58.

² Puhl, R.M. & Heuer, C.A. (2009) The stigma of obesity: a review and update. *Obesity* 17, 941-964.

³ Puhl, R.m. (2014). <https://vimeo.com/112431431>



Further information and resources

Further information that members may find useful is listed below. Most of the information and resources available have been developed in the US and Canada. The ASO would welcome the development of evidence based resources in the UK.

Using people first language

<http://www.obesityaction.org/wp-content/uploads/People-First.pdf>.

Portrayal of Individuals Affected by Obesity:

http://www.uconnruddcenter.org/files/Pdfs/MediaGuidelines_PortrayalObese.pdf

Appropriate imagery: <http://www.obesitynetwork.ca/images-bank> and

<http://www.uconnruddcenter.org/media-gallery>

Challenge and test your own attitudes and behaviours:

<http://biastoolkit.uconnruddcenter.org/module1.html>

Project Implicit® <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>

General information:

UConn Rudd Center: <http://www.uconnruddcenter.org/weight-bias-stigma>

http://www.uconnruddcenter.org/files/Pdfs/Rudd_Policy_Brief_Weight_Bias.pdf

American College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists: <http://www.acog.org/Resources-And-Publications/Committee-Opinions/Committee-on-Ethics/Ethical-Issues-in-the-Care-of-the-Obese-Woman>

Obesity Action Coalition: <http://www.obesityaction.org/weight-bias-and-stigma>

The Obesity Society: <http://www.obesity.org/publications/weight-bias-task-force-issues-policy-statement.htm>

ASO June 2015