Perceptions of Weight Bias and Weight-Based Discrimination Laws by Race/Ethnicity

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BACKGROUND

- Weight bias is pervasive and harmful, yet few protections exist against weight-based discrimination.
- Perceptions of obesity bias and anti-discrimination laws are understudied, particularly among racial/ethnic groups historically underserved in obesity advocacy.

AIM:

To examine perceptions of weight bias and support for laws against weight-based discrimination across racial/ethnic groups, including those traditionally underserved in anti-weight bias efforts.

METHODS

- 26-question online survey administered through a SurveyMonkey survey panel of U.S. adults in May-August 2020.
- Logistic regression to identify predictors support for laws against weight-based discrimination.
- Chi-square and Kruskal-Wallis tests to compare categorical and ordinal variables.
- Table 1. Demographics of Study Sample:

	All (n=1888)	API (n=328)	Hispanic (n=404)	Black (n=395)	White (n=761)
Age (years)					
18-29	691 (36.6%)	157 (47.9%)	205 (50.7%)	168 (42.5%)	161 (21.2%)
30-44	487 (25.8%)	112 (34.1%)	116 (28.7%)	104 (26.3%)	155 (20.4%)
45-60	266 (24.7%)	53 (16.2%)	68 (16.8%)	99 (25.1%)	246 (32.4%)
>60	243 (12.9%)	6 (1.8%)	15 (3.7%)	24 (6.1%)	198 (26.1%)
Gender					
Male	836 (44.3%)	173 (52.7%)	193 (47.8%)	159 (40.3%)	311 (40.9%)
Female	1041 (55.1%)	154 (47.0%)	209 (51.7%)	233 (59.0%)	445 (58.5%)
Income ($)					
50k or less	636 (33.7%)	95 (29.0%)	151 (37.4%)	170 (43.0%)	220 (28.9%)
>50k-100k	636 (33.7%)	116 (35.4%)	151 (37.4%)	102 (25.8%)	267 (35.1%)
>100k-150k	249 (13.2%)	48 (14.6%)	35 (8.7%)	47 (11.9%)	119 (15.6%)
>150k	232 (12.3%)	48 (14.6%)	40 (9.9%)	46 (11.6%)	98 (12.9%)
No opinion	135 (7.2%)	21 (6.4%)	27 (6.7%)	30 (7.6%)	57 (7.5%)
Personal weight (mean; 1=Very Underweight, 5=Very Overweight)	3.57	3.33	3.56	3.61	3.65

RESULTS

A. PERCEPTIONS OF OBESITY AND WEIGHT BIAS

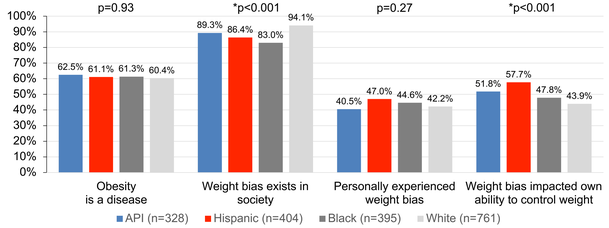

Figure 1. Acknowledgement of the disease model of obesity, weight bias, and personal impact from weight bias. Acknowledgement of societal weight bias was higher among White than API, Hispanic, or Non-Hispanic Black respondents (p<0.05 pairwise). Higher rates of Hispanic than Non-Hispanic Black (p=0.005) or White (p<0.001) respondents reported weight bias impacted ability to control their weight.

B. PERCEPTIONS OF AMERICANS WITH OBESITY AND OBESITY ADVOCACY GROUPS

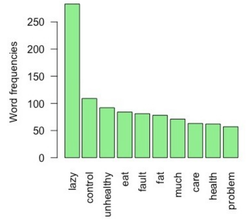

Figure 2. What do Americans think about people with obesity? Most common unigrams in free-text answers.

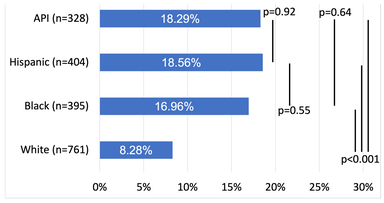

Figure 3. Have you heard of the Obesity Action Coalition, a nonprofit organization for people with obesity?

C. SHOULD THERE BE LAWS AGAINST WEIGHT-BASED DISCRIMINATION?

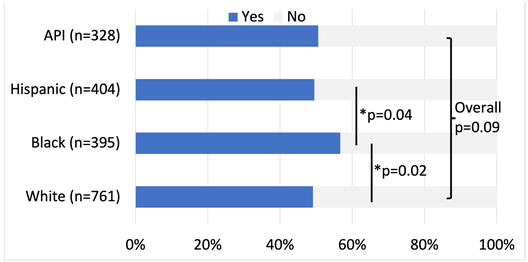

Figure 3. Rates of support across race/ethnicity groups for laws protecting against discrimination on the basis of weight. Chi-square tests performed with significance threshold of p<0.05.

- Black respondents (56.7%) were more likely than White (49.1%) or Hispanic (49.5%) respondents to support laws against weight-based discrimination.
- All other pairwise tests across race/ethnicity groups were non-significant.

Table 2 (right panel). Univariable and multivariable logistic regression on support for laws against weight-based discrimination.

- In fully adjusted multivariable models, **Black race (OR 1.38, p=0.02), female gender (OR 1.43, p<0.001), household income $50,000-100,000 (OR 1.46, p=0.02), endorsement of medical model of obesity as a disease (OR 1.78, p<0.001), and personal experience of weight bias (OR 2.02, p<0.001)** had significantly higher odds of support for such anti-discrimination legislation.

D. PREDICTORS OF SUPPORT FOR LAWS AGAINST WEIGHT DISCRIMINATION

	Univariable		Multivariable	
	OR (95% CI)	p-value	OR (95% CI)	p-value
Race/Ethnicity (ref = White)				
Asian	1.06 (0.82, 1.37)	0.66	1.15 (0.87, 1.51)	0.33
Black	**1.36 (1.06, 1.73)**	**0.01**	**1.38 (1.06, 1.78)**	**0.02**
Hispanic	1.01 (0.80, 1.29)	0.91	0.99 (0.77, 1.28)	0.96
Gender (ref = Male)				
Female	**1.62 (1.35, 1.95)**	**<0.001**	**1.43 (1.18, 1.74)**	**<0.001**
Other	0.12 (0.01, 0.65)	0.047	0.11 (0.01, 0.59)	0.04
Age (ref = 18-29 years)				
30-45	0.99 (0.78,1.25)	0.92	NA	NA
45-60	1.13 (0.89, 1.43)	0.31	NA	NA
>60	0.76 (0.57, 1.02)	0.07	NA	NA
Household Income ($k, ref = 100-150k)				
50 or less	1.34 (1.00, 1.80)	0.05	1.28 (0.94, 1.75)	0.11
>50-100	**1.37 (1.02, 1.85)**	**0.03**	**1.46 (1.07, 1.99)**	**0.02**
≥150	1.16 (0.81, 1.67)	0.41	1.25 (0.86, 1.81)	0.25
No opinion	1.05 (0.69, 1.60)	0.81	1.21 (0.78, 1.89)	0.39
Belief that obesity is a disease				
Yes	**1.98 (1.64, 2.39)**	**<0.001**	**1.78 (1.47, 2.17)**	**<0.001**
Personally experienced weight bias				
Yes	**2.20 (1.83, 2.66)**	**<0.001**	**2.02 (1.65, 2.46)**	**<0.001**
Self-reported weight status (ref = "About right")				
Very underweight	0.59 (0.27, 1.23)	0.17	**0.45 (0.20, 0.96)**	**0.04**
Somewhat underweight	0.98 (0.66, 1.44)	0.9	0.85 (0.57, 1.28)	0.44
Somewhat overweight	**1.26 (1.03, 1.54)**	**0.02**	1.04 (0.84, 1.29)	0.74
Very overweight	**2.09 (1.50, 2.92)**	**<0.001**	1.34 (0.95, 1.92)	0.1

- **Across racial and ethnic groups**, persons experienced weight bias and have begun to recognize obesity as a chronic disease.
- **Gaps remain in public recognition** of obesity advocacy organizations including the Obesity Action Coalition.
- **Building on a base of support** from individuals who are black, female, and/or have experienced weight bias may strengthen obesity anti-discrimination legislative efforts.

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