

WHAT IS STIGMA AND BIAS?

- When people hold negative weight-related beliefs or attitudes towards people in larger bodies, this is known as weight bias.
- When expressed as social exclusion, stereotyping and discrimination, this is called weight stigma.
- Weight bias and stigma impact on mental and physical health and can lead people living with overweight or obesity to engage in behaviours that promote poor nutrition and more sedentary lifestyle.
- It causes people to avoid appointments with health professionals and generally lead them to feel excluded from society. People who are stigmatised face social rejection and lower peer acceptance.
- The range of psychological consequences for someone living with obesity can be increased for depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, poor body image and even suicidal ideology.
- Weight bias and stigma does not increase motivation or entice people to lose weight.
- Popular expressions such as ‘energy in versus energy out’ or ‘calories in versus calories out’ are misleading because they inaccurately imply that body weight and/or fat mass are solely influenced by the number of food calories ingested, and the amount of energy burned through exercise.

This narrative is not supported by evidence and provides a foundation for popular stigmatizing views that blame individuals’ lack of willpower for their obesity.

Weight stigma has become a serious public health issue.



“One of the key principles guiding the work of the National Obesity Management Clinical Programme, and the Model of Care for Management of Overweight and Obesity in Ireland, is that weight-based stigma and obesity discrimination will not be tolerated in the healthcare system”

-Donal O’Shea,
Obesity Clinical Lead, HSE