



MAKING A CASE FOR LEGISLATION TO END SIZE DISCRIMINATION



It is not our differences that divide us.
**It is our inability to recognize, accept,
and celebrate those differences.**

[Audre Lorde, *Our Dead Behind Us: Poems*]



Sizeism¹, or discrimination based on body size, has increased to the point in our global society that it has become a matter of social injustice. It affects the daily lives of countless individuals and families through inequities in employment, education and health care. It is evidenced in the attitudes and actions of governments and the media, which poisons the hearts of the public against an entire group of the populace.

The Council of Europe states it this way:

“In the Council of Europe, we believe that discrimination constitutes an offence against human dignity. It is like poison, destroying the very fabric of our societies.” [Council of Europe, 2005]

“Discrimination is rarely coincidental. It feeds on intolerance which unfortunately, persists in all our societies, and what is very often accepted, encouraged or even created by acts of authority.” [Mrs Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe, 2005]

According to Matthew Robinson, PhD, of Appalachian State University:

“Social justice is defined as ‘... promoting a just society by challenging injustice and valuing diversity.’ It exists when ‘all people share a common humanity and therefore have a right to equitable treatment, support for their human rights, and a fair allocation of community resources.’” (Toowoomba Catholic Education, 2006).²

The necessity for legislating social justice to embrace size diversity in our global society has become imminent. NOW is the time to enact legislation to include “height and weight” or “size” as a protected identity group in all anti-discrimination laws.

¹ Sizeism, or size discrimination, is defined as prejudice or discrimination against a person or persons on the basis of physical size, esp. against those viewed as “overweight” or “short”. [Oxford English Dictionary, 2012]

² <https://libguides.broward.edu/socialjustice>

- The stereotypical portrayal of individuals with “obesity” was related to implicit anti-fat attitudes, which may have implications for the development, maintenance, and expression of stigmatizing anti-fat attitudes. [Hinman, et al, 2015]
- Study results suggest a profound global diffusion of negative ideas about “obesity”. Given the moral attributions embedded in these now shared ideas about fat bodies, a globalization of body norms and fat stigma, not just of “obesity” itself, appears to be well under way, and it has the potential to proliferate associated prejudice and suffering. [Brewis, et al, 2011]
- Three bills that would protect “overweight” people from discrimination have been introduced in Israel [Israel National News, 2016] and efforts are being made in Toronto to add size discrimination to the Ontario (Canada) human rights code. [The Establishment, 2016]
- There is strong, consistent support for policies prohibiting weight discrimination [in the U.S.] [Suh, et al, 2014]
- In the U.S., only Michigan and 6 cities have laws protecting against weight discrimination.



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Weight discrimination is particularly visible in employment settings and perpetuates social and economic inequalities for fat employees.

[Suh, et al, 2014]

SIZE DISCRIMINATION IN THE WORKPLACE

- Fat people can be terminated or suspended because of their weight, despite good job performance. [Rothblum, et al, 1990]
- Both men and women who were “obese” experienced lower wages compared to their “normal weight” counterparts. Fat women were paid 14.6% less than their “normal weight” counterparts. [Dor, et al, 2011]
- 45% of 1,000 employers polled in the U.K. admitted they were less inclined to recruit at interview stage if the applicant was “obese”. [Crossland Employment Solicitors Survey, 2015]
- Fat people get fewer promotions. [Loh, 1993]

“[f]or fat students, the school experience is one of ongoing prejudice, unnoticed discrimination, and almost constant harassment. From nursery school through college, fat students experience ostracism, discouragement, and sometimes violence. ... They are deprived of places on honor rolls, sports teams, and cheerleading squads and are denied letters of recommendation” [U.S. National Education Association, 2010]

SIZE DISCRIMINATION IN EDUCATION

- Negative attitudes start in preschool and progress as students age. [Turnbull, et al, 2000]
- 1 of 3 children has experienced weight bias from a teacher. [Rudd Report, 2008]
- 28% of teachers in one study said that becoming “obese” is the worst thing that can happen to a person. [Puhl and Brownell, 2001]
- In Elementary School, the likelihood of being bullied is 63% higher for an “obese” child than a “non-overweight” peer. [Lumeng, et al, 2010]
- Controlling for income and grades, parents provide less college support for their “overweight” children than for their “thin” children. [Puhl and Brownell, 2001]
- Higher BMI significantly predicted fewer post-interview offers of admission into psychology graduate programs. Results also suggest this relationship is stronger for female applicants. [Burmeister, et al, 2013]

THE SOLUTION:

LEGISLATION AND EDUCATION TO ENSURE SIZE EQUALITY

NAAFA urges that policies and legislation be put in place to protect the rights of all citizens independent of the size of their bodies.

NAAFA recommends that educational curricula be leveraged for the legal, medical, human resource and academic communities to end size discrimination and promote size diversity. Educational materials can be found on NAAFA’s website at <https://naafa.org/>.

SIZE DISCRIMINATION IN HEALTH CARE

Disrespectful treatment and medical fat shaming is stressful and can cause patients to delay health care seeking or avoid interacting with providers.

[Chrisler & Barney, 2016]

69% & 52%

REPORTED EXPERIENCED

69% of fat patients report having been stigmatized by doctors & 52% experienced bias on more than one occasion. In a survey of 2,449 fat people, more than 2 out of 3 were stigmatized by doctors. [Puhl, 2006]

98.6%

UK trainee dietitians,
doctors, nurses
and nutritionists

98.6% of participants in a U.K. study of trainee dietitians, doctors, nurses and nutritionists expressed weight bias. [Swift, et al, 2013]

One-Half
Nurse Practitioners

A 2014 U.S. survey of Nurse Practitioners indicated that more than 50% held critical attitudes when dealing with fat patients. [Ward-Smith, 2014]

68% DELAY HEALTH CARE

85% DON'T RECEIVE ADEQUATE CARE

68% from a study of almost 500 fat women reported delay in seeking care because of their weight and 85% reported weight was a barrier to receiving appropriate health care.

[Amy, et al, 2006]