

Title: Changing the global narrative: raising awareness of implicit and explicit weight bias in health care professions.

A commentary on: Bradford, H.M., Puhl, R.M., Phillippi, J.C., et al. Implicit and Explicit Weight Bias among Midwives: Variations Across Demographic Characteristics. *J Midwifery Womens Health* 2024;0:1: doi:10.1111/jmwh.13616

#### Implications for Practice and Research

1. This study has implications for raising awareness on weight bias in practice highlighting a need for further inquiry exploring undergraduate education and continuing professional development.
2. This study has the potential to prompt further qualitative research focussing on the experiences and perspectives of health care professionals and weight bias.

#### Methods

An online survey was used to measure weight bias of midwives. The survey included demographic questions about age, years since certification, Body Mass Index (BMI), race and ethnicity and state of residence. Participants completed measures of implicit and explicit weight bias including the Implicit Association Test (IAT), the Anti-Fat Attitudes (AFT) questionnaire, the Fat Phobia Scale-Short Form (FPS) and the Preference for Thin People (PTP). Data was analysed using linear and multinomial regressions to determine relationships between demographics and level of bias.

#### Findings

The study found that the BMI of participants has a significant association with implicit and explicit weight bias. Specifically, midwives with a lower BMI demonstrate a higher level of implicit and explicit weight bias. BMI is the only consistent factor across the measures demonstrating a relationship with implicit and explicit weight bias. Other demographic factors including age impacted on bias depending on the weight bias measure used.

#### Context

The World Obesity Federation have issued a position statement outlining recommendations with a goal of eliminating weight stigma<sup>1</sup>. These recommendations focus on making distinctions between body size and obesity, language, legislation, human rights and raising awareness of weight stigma. This global drive has the potential to influence research and education of weight bias in health care professionals. Studies on weight bias are key to ensuring health care professionals use approaches that will increase awareness, improve communication, and reduce implicit and explicit weight bias during the delivery of person-centred care.

#### Commentary

This study captures an overview of implicit and explicit weight bias among practicing midwives. Weight stigma is recognised globally as a determinant of health and discrimination relating to higher body weight is associated impacts on human rights.<sup>2</sup> The societal ideal favouring thinness influences the discourse discriminating against higher body weight.<sup>3</sup> It is unsurprising therefore, that current research highlights bias in health care professionals.<sup>4</sup> This bias is evident at the start of the professional journey, a study focussing on student nurses demonstrates that it exists throughout the undergraduate experience.<sup>5</sup> This was particularly related to a younger age group whereas second degree nurses demonstrate a reduced level of bias.<sup>5</sup> Training on self-awareness, privilege, and communication is key to raise awareness on the discourse of weight bias.<sup>6</sup> A pilot study on reducing weight bias in health care professionals as part of continuing professional development produced positive results.<sup>6</sup> Participants in the pilot experienced significant episodes of self-reflection and aspirations for changing attitudes and perceptions after engaging with a series of podcasts on the lived experience of people with higher body weight.<sup>6</sup> The development of this type of education has the potential to positively influence the current discourse through allowing health care professionals to explore their own implicit and explicit bias. Educators in both undergraduate and continuing professional education must consider the ongoing research and drivers for changing the global obesity narrative.

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#### Declaration of Interests

I declare that I have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to have influenced the work reported in this commentary.

