

Comparing views on obesity across cultures and stages of health training

Submission date 21/04/2026	Recruitment status Recruiting	☐ Prospectively registered
		☐ Protocol
Registration date 27/07/2026	Overall study status Ongoing	☐ Statistical analysis plan
		☐ Results
Last Edited 27/07/2026	Condition category Nutritional, Metabolic, Endocrine	☐ Individual participant data
		☒ Record updated in last year

Plain English summary of protocol

Background and study aims

Obesity stigma refers to negative attitudes, beliefs, and stereotypes about people living with obesity. This stigma can affect not only individuals’ well-being but also the quality of healthcare they receive. Research has shown that even healthcare professionals and students may hold biased views.

This study aims to explore attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions about obesity among university students studying health-related degrees (such as Medicine, Nutrition, Nursing, Psychology, Physiotherapy, and Physical Activity). It will also examine whether these attitudes differ depending on the student’s stage of training and across different countries. The goal is to better understand how education and cultural context influence obesity stigma, and to help improve future training for healthcare professionals.

Who can participate?

Students enrolled in undergraduate health-related degree programs (Medicine, Nutrition, Nursing, Psychology, Physiotherapy, and Physical Activity) at participating universities in Spain, Mexico, and Chile.

What does the study involve?

Participants will be asked to complete an anonymous online survey using Microsoft Forms.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?

The findings may help improve education and training for future healthcare professionals, promoting more respectful and informed care for people living with obesity.

The possible risks of participating mainly relate to the nature of the questions. Some survey items may touch on sensitive topics around weight, health, or personal experiences with stigma, which could potentially cause emotional discomfort or distress for certain individuals. Because the survey is self-reported, participants may feel uncertain about how their responses will be used, though the study is designed to contribute to a better understanding of obesity stigma and its impact on individuals and society.

Where is the study run from?
University of Rovira i Virgili, Spain.

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?
November 2025 to December 2030.

Who is funding the study?
University of Rovira i Virgili, Spain.

Who is the main contact?
Mrs Mònica Bulló, monica.bullo@urv.cat

Contact information

Type(s)

Scientific, Principal investigator, Public

Contact name

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Additional identifiers

Study information

Scientific Title

Cross-cultural and academic trajectory perspectives on obesity stigma: a comparative study across health science disciplines and training stages

Acronym

CE-STIGMA-O

Study objectives

Obesity stigma is a widespread problem that negatively affects not only those people living with obesity but also the quality of care they receive from health professionals. Biased attitudes and misconceptions about people with obesity can sometimes be found even among health professionals. By investigating these attitudes in undergraduate students from Medicine, Nutrition, Nursing, and Physical Activity programs, this study aims to shed light on when and how such biases might develop or change during professional training. Conducting the study across multiple countries and regions further allows us to examine how cultural and regional

differences might influence stigma. The ultimate goal is to use this evidence to inform and strengthen educational strategies, so that future health professionals are better prepared to approach obesity with understanding and respect, rather than judgment.

Ethics approval required

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Ethics approval(s)

Approved 30/10/2025, IISPV Research Ethics Committee for Medicines (Comité Ético de Investigación con Medicamentos del IISPV) (Hospital Universitari Sant Joan de Reus Avda, Josep Laporte, 2 Planta 0 – E1 color taronja (Admissions), Reus, 43204, Spain; (+34) 977 75 93 94; ceim@iispv.cat), ref: 284/2025

Primary study design

Observational

Secondary study design

Cross sectional study

Study type(s)

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied

Obesity-related stigma in university students.

Interventions

Data will be collected through structured anonymous surveys administered via Microsoft forms. The survey will include sections on general sociodemographic information and a set of validated questionnaires designed to assess multiple dimensions, including knowledge, attitudes, behaviours, and self-perceived competencies relevant to the students' field of study. The survey will be distributed to participants through email invitations and public announcements, ensuring wide accessibility and voluntary participation.

a) Sociodemographic information will be collected from participants including age, gender identity, race, ethnicity, student status, and self-perceived body weight. These variables will be self-reported through a structured questionnaire to ensure consistency in responses. The inclusion of these measures will allow for the characterization of the sample and will facilitate the examination of potential associations between sociodemographic factors and study outcomes.

b) Antifat Attitudes (AFA) Spanish validated scale: Prejudice against people with obesity will be assessed using the validated Spanish Antifat Attitudes (AFA) scale, a 13-item, 7-point Likert instrument with three subscales (dislike, fear of being fat, willpower). Subscale and overall scores will be calculated as the mean of corresponding items, with higher scores indicating stronger antifat attitudes. The scale has shown good reliability ($\alpha = 0.78-0.87$).

c) Beliefs About Obese Persons (BAOP) Spanish validated scale: Beliefs about obesity will be assessed using the 8-item BAOP scale, which evaluates the extent to which participants believe obesity is controllable. Items will be rated on a Likert-type scale, and mean scores will be calculated, with higher values indicating stronger beliefs that obesity is uncontrollable.

d) Modified Weight Bias Internalization Scale (WBIS-M): Internalized weight bias will be assessed using the 11-item WBIS-M. Participants will rate items on 7-point Likert scale. Items 1 and 9 were reverse scored. Higher scores will indicate stronger endorsement of negative weight-related stereotypes.

e) Attitudes Toward Obese Persons (ATOP) English validated scale: Attitudes toward people

with obesity will be measured using the 20-item ATOP scale. Items will be rated on a Likert-type scale, and total scores will be calculated as the mean of all items, with higher scores reflecting more positive attitudes. The scale has demonstrated good reliability ($\alpha \approx 0.80$)

f) Fat Phobia Scale–Short English validated Form (FPS-SF): Negative attitudes toward people with obesity will be assessed using the 14-item FPS-SF. Items will be rated on a 5-point semantic differential scale, and total scores will be calculated as the mean of all items. Higher scores will indicate stronger fat-phobic attitudes. The scale has demonstrated good reliability ($\alpha \approx 0.86$).

Overall, while all five instruments relate to weight bias, they differ in scope: AFA and FPSSF capture general attitudes, ATOP and BAOP focus on beliefs and cognitive appraisals, and WBIS-M measures internalized stigma. Using these complementary tools provides a comprehensive assessment of both attitudes toward obesity and the personal impact of weight stigma.

Intervention Type

Behavioural

Primary outcome(s)

1. Sociodemographic characteristics (age, gender identity, race, ethnicity, student status, and self-perceived body weight) measured using self-report using a structured questionnaire at a single assessment time point
2. Antifat attitudes measured using the Spanish validated 13-item Antifat Attitudes (AFA) scale at a single assessment time point
3. Beliefs about obesity controllability measured using the Spanish validated 8-item Beliefs About Obese Persons (BAOP) scale at a single assessment time point
4. Internalized weight bias measured using the 11-item Modified Weight Bias Internalization Scale (WBIS-M), at a single assessment time point
5. Attitudes toward people with obesity measured using the English validated 20-item Attitudes Toward Obese Persons (ATOP) scale at a single assessment time point
6. Fat-phobic attitudes measured using the English validated 14-item Fat Phobia Scale–Short Form (FPS-SF), at a single assessment time point

Key secondary outcome(s)

Completion date

18/12/2030

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria

Students who have given informed consent.

Healthy volunteers allowed

Yes

Age group

Mixed

Lower age limit

17 Years

Upper age limit

100 Years

Sex

All

Total final enrolment

0

Key exclusion criteria

Not meeting the key inclusion criteria

Date of first enrolment

18/11/2025

Date of final enrolment

18/11/2028

Locations**Countries of recruitment**

Chile

Mexico

Spain

Sponsor information**Organisation**

Universitat Rovira i Virgili

ROR

<https://ror.org/00g5sqv46>

Funder(s)**Funder type****Funder Name**

Universitat Rovira i Virgili

Alternative Name(s)

Rovira i Virgili University, Universidad Rovira i Virgili

Funding Body Type

Government organisation

Funding Body Subtype

Local government

Location

Spain

Results and Publications

Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan**IPD sharing plan summary**

Not expected to be made available