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Americans Support Laws to Prohibit Weight Discrimination

New Haven, Conn. – American adults are in favor of legislation to prohibit weight discrimination, particularly in the workplace, according to a Yale University study published online in the journal *Obesity*. Researchers Rebecca M. Puhl, Ph.D., and Chelsea A. Heuer, M.P.H., of Yale’s Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity found considerable public support for workplace laws that would prevent employers from refusing to hire, denying promotions to, assigning lower wages to, or terminating qualified obese employees based on their weight.

The study, which is the first to have examined public support for different forms of legislation prohibiting weight discrimination, polled a national sample of more than 1,000 American adults. Participants were asked how much they would support several different legislative measures to prohibit weight discrimination.

Results showed that 65% of men and 81% of women support anti-discrimination laws to protect obese employees in the workplace. Additionally, 47% of men and 61% of women expressed support for laws that would prohibit weight discrimination by adding body weight as a protected category in existing Civil Rights laws. In all cases, women were more supportive than men of legislation prohibiting weight discrimination.

“Legal measures to prohibit weight discrimination can help rectify employment inequalities, facilitate public health efforts to improve the health and well-being of obese Americans, and reduce the social acceptability of weight bias,” said Dr. Puhl.

The least support was found for legislative measures that would consider obesity a disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which would extend the same protections to obese persons as those with physical disabilities.

While legislation has been discussed for several decades as a potential solution to prohibit weight discrimination, no such federal laws currently exist.

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