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Six year olds worried about their weight says new research

Abstract (English): "The importance of stigma and associated discrimination cannot be overestimated given reports that weight and mental health stigma may lead to poorer body image, low self-esteem, marginalisation leading to social exclusion, reduced quality of life, substance abuse and in some cases self-harming and suicide. "Research shows that there is now...

Full text: Children as young as six are struggling with their body image according to Leeds experts. Catherine Scott reports.

Children as young as six worry about their body image and children as young as three are stigmatised because of their weight, according to new research at Leeds Beckett University.

The research entitled 'The vital links between obesity and psychopathology: the impact of stigma' is published in Primary Prevention Insights. It shows that there is a vital link between obesity and psychopathology, the scientific study of mental disorders, and this should be taken into consideration in the assessment, treatment and prevention of obesity for the best possible result.

Led by Dr Stuart Flint, senior research fellow at Leeds Beckett, the research looks at how weight stigma and discrimination can greatly increase the chance of suffering from mental health issues such as stress and anxiety. It also reveals that even after losing weight people can be left with underlying issues including depression and anxiety.

"The research indicates that a whole systems approach that is holistic in nature, and considers the factors identified as contributing to obesity, is needed," explains Dr Flint.

"There is proof that interventions that are discipline specific are redundant and are unlikely to lead to long-term weight loss. Delivering non-stigmatising supportive healthcare is of paramount importance because stigma has the potential to reduce the effectiveness of interventions at all levels.

"The importance of stigma and associated discrimination cannot be overestimated given reports that weight and mental health stigma may lead to poorer body image, low self-esteem, marginalisation leading to social exclusion, reduced quality of life, substance abuse and in some cases self-harming and suicide.

"Obese people who have psychopathological concerns are at an increased risk of associated diseases and premature death.

"Eating behaviour and physical inactivity have been associated with depression and mood state and your mood state impacts on your food choice and consumption.

"Research shows that there is now a strong foundation to promote exercise and healthy food and drink as medicine and there are calls for doctors to promote and where appropriate prescribe exercise to treat physical and mental health concerns."

Subject: Self image; Social exclusion; Mental health; Weight control; Mental disorders; Psychopathology; Stigma; Obesity;

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