Pediatric Health Care Professionals' Attitudes and Beliefs about Weight Stigma: A Descriptive Study

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Children face weight-based stigma from their healthcare providers at a disconcerting rate, and efforts to mitigate this have been scant. This study aimed to quantify pediatric healthcare professionals' attitudes and beliefs about weight stigma and to determine stigma reduction interventions that are most supported by pediatric healthcare providers. Participants completed two validated instruments which measured implicit and explicit weight bias, respectively. They then completed a researcher-designed questionnaire to assess their attitudes and beliefs about weight stigma, and demographic questions. ANOVA models were used to examine associations between bias measures and participant characteristics, chi-square analyses were used to examine associations between questionnaire responses and participant characteristics, and Spearman's rank was used to determine correlations between weight bias and questionnaire responses. Participants exhibited moderate-to-high levels of implicit and explicit weight bias (mean Implicit Association Test score = 0.59, mean Crandall Anti-Fat Attitudes Score = 38.95). Associations were noted between implicit bias and years in practice ($p < 0.05$), and implicit bias and occupation ($p < 0.05$). There was a significant correlation between explicit bias and multiple questionnaire items, suggesting that healthcare providers with greater weight bias are aware of those biases and are ready to take action to address them. Though pediatric healthcare exhibit weight-based biases, they are invested in taking steps to mitigate these biases and their impact on patients. The results of this study can inform the design of future interventions that aim to reduce healthcare-based weight bias, thus improving the quality of pediatric healthcare.

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