

Abstract

Sizeism is a Health Hazard

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Sizeism and stereotypes of fat people can have a negative impact on their physical health and well-being. Disrespectful treatment and medical fat shaming (in an attempt to motivate people to change their behavior) is stressful and can cause patients to delay health care seeking or avoid interacting with providers. The assumption that weight is responsible for, or related to, almost any presenting complaint has resulted in misdiagnosis. Recommending different treatments for patients with the same condition based on their weight (e.g., weight loss for fat patients; CAT scan, blood work, or physical therapy for other patients) is unethical and a form of malpractice. Intersectional identities can result in a greater cumulative burden for people who experience sizeism as well as other forms of oppression (e.g., sexism, ageism, racism, classism, transphobia), and the stress that such unfairness causes can damage people's health. Better training for health care providers and empowerment of patients are recommended.