

Child bullies most often pick on others for 'being fat'

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Schoolboys bullying a peer at school.

A new multi-national study by the Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity at the University of Connecticut has found that weight-based bullying is viewed as the most common form of bullying among

children.

The survey of views among 2,866 adults in the United States, Canada, Iceland, and Australia showed that "being fat" was perceived to be the most prevalent reason that children are bullied in their own country, compared with other reasons for bullying such as race or ethnicity, sexual orientation, or religion.

"Given high rates of childhood obesity in these and many other countries, both school-level and policy-level remedies may be needed to address weight-based bullying on a broad level to improve quality of life for youth with obesity," says Rebecca Puhl, the study's lead author, professor-in-residence in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies at UConn, and deputy director of the Rudd Center.

"Our study shows that there is substantial public support for these policy measures," she says.

Specific findings of the study, published in the journal *Pediatric Obesity*, included:

- At least 70 percent of survey participants across all countries perceived weight-based bullying in youth as a common problem.
- At least 69 percent across all countries viewed weight-based bullying as a serious or very serious issue.
- Between 75 percent and 87 percent of participants across countries agreed that school-based efforts should promote awareness about weight-based bullying and implement policies to better protect students from weight-based bullying.
- At least 74 percent across countries supported government efforts to strengthen existing anti-bullying laws to include provisions to address weight-based bullying.

The findings also showed that there is public interest in having multiple groups address this problem. At least 60 percent (and as high as 94 percent) of participants across the four countries viewed schools, teachers, parents, healthcare providers, and the government as each having an important role in protecting youth from weight-based bullying. This suggests that survey participants view weight-based bullying as a problem that requires attention and intervention from multiple levels and sources, according to Puhl.

"Our findings echo recent research from the U.S. showing that parents favor strengthening school-based policies and state laws to address weight-based [bullying](#)," she says. "The time may be ripe to implement school-level policy changes to ensure that vulnerable youth are protected."

The study was conducted between February and July 2013. The four nations were selected for their comparable rates of adult overweight and [obesity](#), as well as similarities in sociocultural values of thinness, parliamentary or congressional democracies, and other societal factors.

More information: "Cross-national perspectives about weight-based bullying in youth: nature, extent and remedies." *Pediatric Obesity*. doi: 10.1111/ijpo.12051

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