

# Too Big to be Seen:

Weight-Based Discrimination Amongst Student Nurses

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# Background & Purpose of the Study

- BACKGROUND: This study examined student nurses' attitudes with obese clients to evaluate, educate, and amend discriminatory actions.



- The purpose of this study was to determine how weight stigma affects quality of care rendered by nurses
- Whether awareness of weight discrimination is an effective intervention in changing nurses' attitudes and beliefs about obese pt.

# Methods

- Obesity Training

- Questionnaire - Attitudes toward obese patient scale was given

*(next slide)*

- BMI Chart review
- Brief discussion on working with obese patient & cause of obesity
- Weight bias of society
- Impact of stigma in seeking care

# Participants

- 6 semesters of clinical students (N=103) during their training as student nurses.
- Various levels of nursing received obesity education and strategies every week in clinical
  - From Adult 1 – first semester through
  - Synthesis – last semester

Table 1 Survey-The Attitudes Toward Obese Persons Scale (Barra, 2015)

	<b>Pre - Project</b>			
n= 103	<b>#1 Agree</b>	<b>#2 Strongly agree</b>	<b>#3 Disagree</b>	<b>#4 Strongly disagree</b>
	n	n	n	n
<b>Obese client size is offensive to me; the larger the client, the more offensive</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Obese client for the most part have a foul body odor</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Obese client is usually sloppy in their appearance</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Obese client is lazy with a lifestyle that lacks self discipline.</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>9</b>

# Group Discussion

- Identify your bias
  - 1. Is the obese patient a challenge for you?
  - 2. Are you comfortable working with obese patients?
  - 3. Is obesity a matter of willpower, eat less/exercise more?
- Identify your concerns for rendering care
  - 4. Do you feel you have the proper equipment and support to effective care for an obese patient?
  - *Larger BP cuff, extra wide with > weight capacity- bed, stretcher, W/C, Hoyer lift, commode, chair*

## Weight in Pounds

	100	110	120	130	140	150	160	170	180	190	200	210	220	230	240	250
4'	30.5	33.6	36.6	39.7	42.7	45.8	48.8	51.9	54.9	58.0	61.0	64.1	67.1	70.2	73.2	76.3
4'2"	28.1	30.9	33.7	36.6	39.4	42.2	45.0	47.8	50.6	53.4	56.2	59.1	61.9	64.7	67.5	70.3
4'4"	26.0	28.6	31.2	33.8	36.4	39.0	41.6	44.2	46.8	49.4	52.0	54.6	57.2	59.8	62.4	65.0
4'6"	24.1	26.5	28.9	31.3	33.8	36.2	38.6	41.0	43.4	45.8	48.2	50.6	53.0	55.4	57.9	60.3
4'8"	22.4	24.7	26.9	29.1	31.4	33.6	35.9	38.1	40.4	42.6	44.8	47.1	49.3	51.6	53.8	56.0
4'10"	20.9	23.0	25.1	27.2	29.3	31.3	33.4	35.5	37.6	39.7	41.8	43.9	46.0	48.1	50.2	52.2
5'	19.5	21.5	23.4	25.4	27.3	29.3	31.2	33.2	35.2	37.1	39.1	41.0	43.0	44.9	46.9	48.8
5'2"	18.3	20.1	21.9	23.8	25.6	27.4	29.3	31.1	32.9	34.7	36.6	38.4	40.2	42.1	43.9	45.7
5'4"	17.2	18.9	20.6	22.3	24.0	25.7	27.5	29.2	30.9	32.6	34.3	36.0	37.8	39.5	41.2	42.9
5'6"	16.1	17.8	19.4	21.0	22.6	24.2	25.8	27.4	29.0	30.7	32.3	33.9	35.5	37.1	38.7	40.3
5'8"	15.2	16.7	18.2	19.8	21.3	22.8	24.3	25.8	27.4	28.9	30.4	31.9	33.4	35.0	36.5	38.0
5'10"	14.3	15.8	17.2	18.7	20.1	21.5	23.0	24.4	25.8	27.3	28.7	30.1	31.6	33.0	34.4	35.9
6'	13.6	14.9	16.3	17.6	19.0	20.3	21.7	23.1	24.4	25.8	27.1	28.5	29.8	31.2	32.5	33.9
6'2"	12.8	14.1	15.4	16.7	18.0	19.3	20.5	21.8	23.1	24.4	25.7	27.0	28.2	29.5	30.8	32.1
6'4"	12.2	13.4	14.6	15.8	17.0	18.3	19.5	20.7	21.9	23.1	24.3	25.6	26.8	28.0	29.2	30.4
6'6"	11.6	12.7	13.9	15.0	16.2	17.3	18.5	19.6	20.8	22.0	23.1	24.3	25.4	26.6	27.7	28.9
6'8"	11.0	12.1	13.2	14.3	15.4	16.5	17.6	18.7	19.8	20.9	22.0	23.1	24.2	25.3	26.4	27.5
6'10"	10.5	11.5	12.5	13.6	14.6	15.7	16.7	17.8	18.8	19.9	20.9	22.0	23.0	24.0	25.1	26.1
7'	10.0	11.0	12.0	13.0	13.9	14.9	15.9	16.9	17.9	18.9	19.9	20.9	21.9	22.9	23.9	24.9

<http://www.freebmi-calculator.net>

Underweight
  Normal
  Overweight
  Obesity

## Defining Obesity

BMI 18.5-24.9	Normal Weight
BMI 25-29.9	Overweight
BMI 30-34.9	Obesity (Class 1)
BMI 35-39.9	Obesity (Class 2)
BMI >40	Obesity (Class 3)

(NIH)

- You could be within your **IDEAL BODY WEIGHT** yet still be considered a plus size by the fashion industry and society

Clinical Groups were asked to  
discuss their reactions  
to the following pictures



# Too Fat to Fly: Did This Man Need Three Seats?

Dec. 4, 2009

By SCOTT MAYEROWITZ





# \$\$\$Cost to Community\$\$\$

A Fire and Rescue Service has been called out 50 times to help severely overweight people out of their homes and into ambulances with apparatus designed for lifting car wrecks. .









•What was your initial reaction to begin assigned to this patient?

Same person before and after having lost 110 pounds



## Clinical Groups Received Education on the Following:

Weight Bias - Origins in society

Nurses' behavior

Reactions of patients

Impact of obese patient health care

Effects of discrimination



# Origins of Weight Bias

- Societal/media portrayals of obesity
- TV/Film Portrayals of Obesity
- Cultural values of thinness
- Attributions about causes of obesity



# Invisibility Tactics

- Nurses on the unit will:
  - Walk past the room even if call light is on
  - Ignore patient as if they didn't exist
  - Refuse to make eye contact or converse



# Nurses Behavior

Nurses view obese patients as:

Lazy    Lacking in self-control    Non-compliant

In one study...

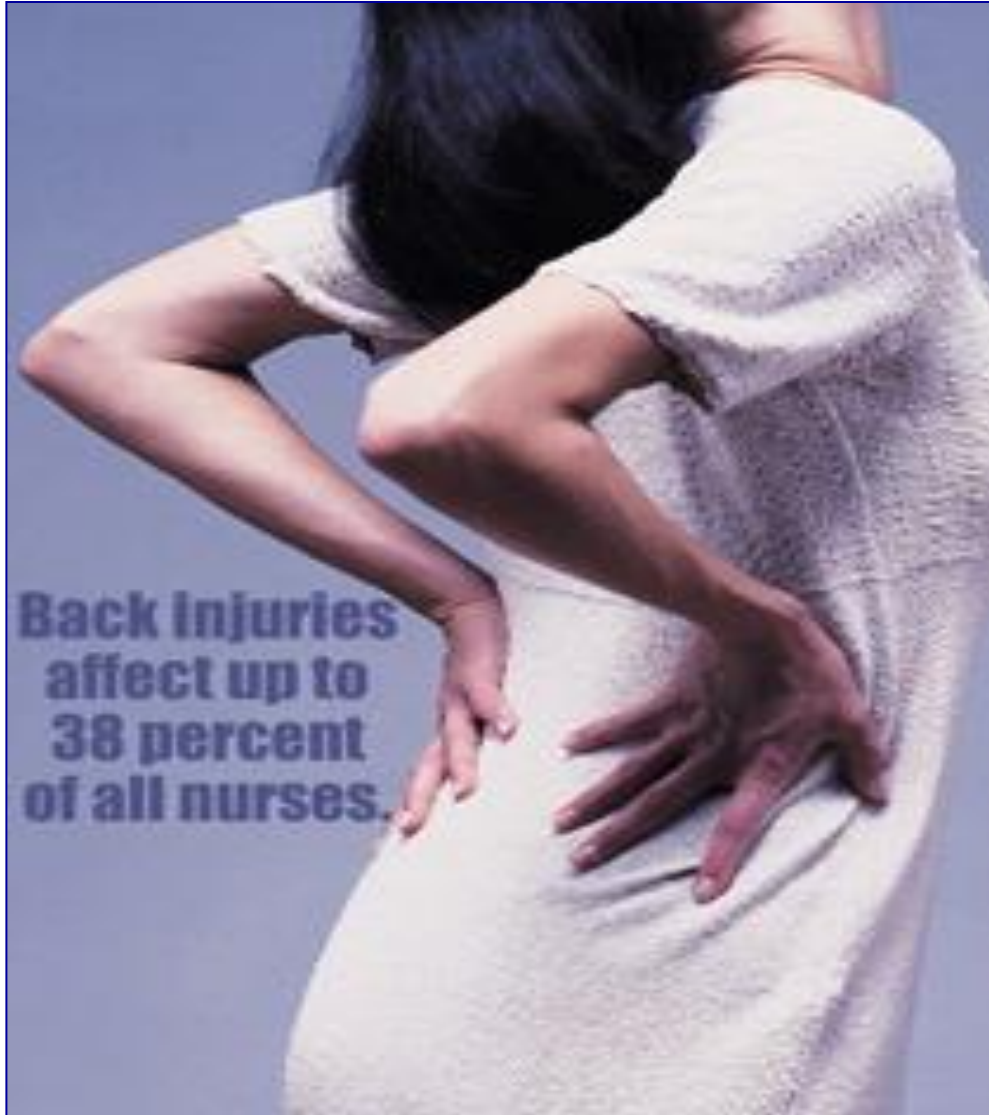
- ➔ 31% “would prefer not to care for obese patients”
- ➔ 24% agreed that obese patients “repulsed them”
- ➔ 12% “would prefer not to touch obese patients”

Brown, 2006; Bagley, 1989; Hoppe & Ogden, 1997; Maroney & Golub, 1992





# Valid concerns of nurse Musculoskeletal Disorders



Work-related musculoskeletal Disorders (MSDs) result when there is a mismatch between the physical capacity of workers and the physical demands of their job



# Impact on Care

- ***Obese patients are less likely to obtain...***

- Preventive health services & exams
- Cancer screens & pelvic exams

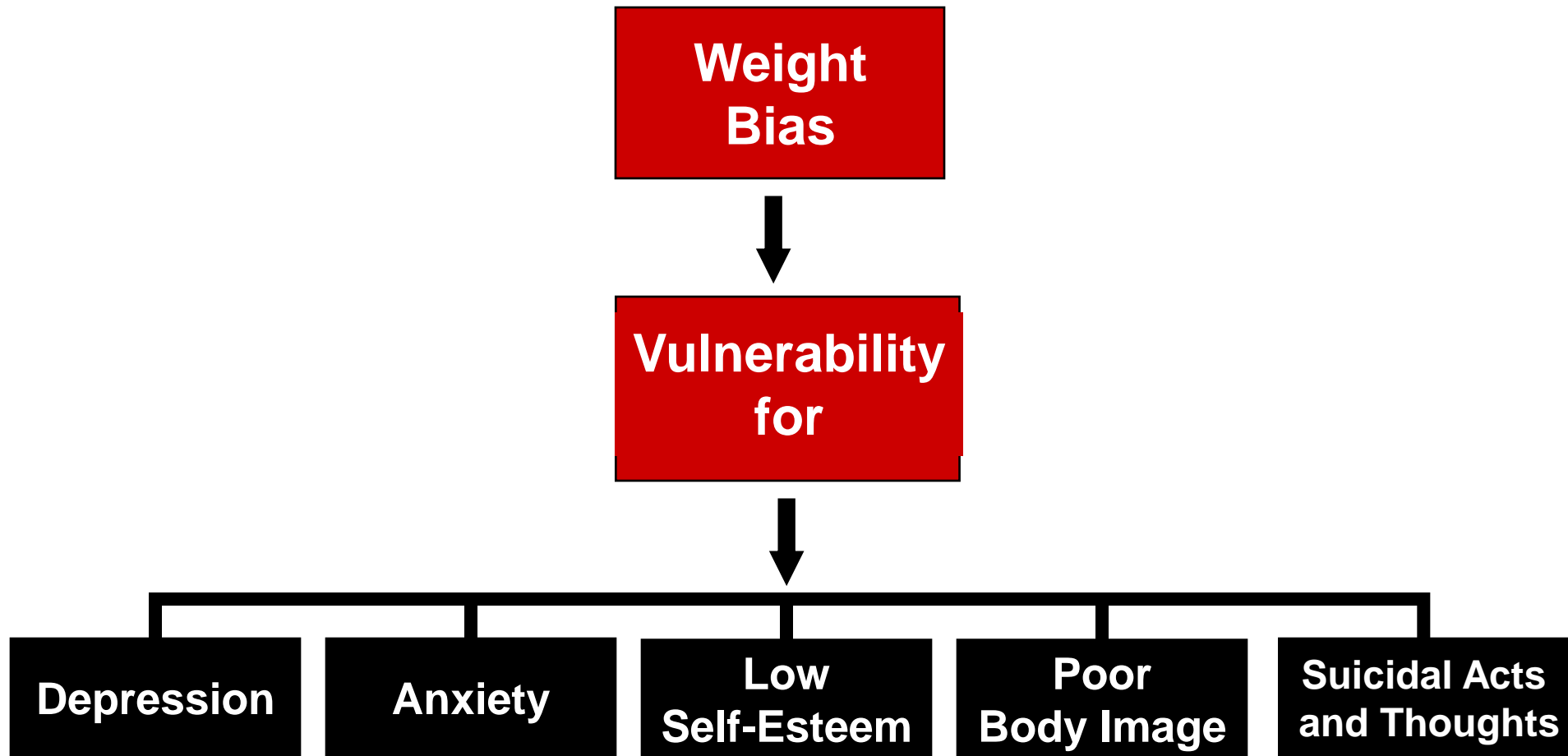
- ***and are more likely to...***

- Cancel appointments
- Delay appointments

- ***Reactions of Patients***

- Feel berated & disrespected by providers
- Upset by comments about their weight from doctors
- Perceive that they will not be taken seriously
- Report that their weight is blamed for all problems
- Reluctant to address weight concerns
- Parents of obese children feel blamed and dismissed

• Anderson & Wadden, 2004; Bertakis & Azari, 2005; Brown et al., 2006; Edmunds, 2005



Cattarin & Thompson, 1994; Eisenberg et al., 2003; Haines, Neumark-Sztainer, Eisenberg, & Hannan, 2006; Hayden-Wade et al., 2005; Lunner et al., 2000; Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2002; Shroff & Thompson, 2004; Thompson et al., 1995; van den Berg et al., 2002; Young-Hyman et al., 2003

# Clinical Groups

- Received Education
- Discussed Data
  
- Strategies
  - Change attitudes – nurse/patient
  - Teamwork
  - Connection to patients/family
  - Quality care

Discussions continued *weekly* throughout the semester.

Aim: To address the multitude of negative experiences, particularly shame, embarrassment, and interference with essential healthcare services.

Upon completion of the clinical semester, a postquestionnaire was administered.

# Weekly Strategies - Sensitivity training toward obese patients

- Focus on the person, not the obesity
- Engage in conversation – learn about this person
- Promote comfort, safety and self-esteem
  
- Choose the Right Words
- Instead of Big Boy Chair – Wider Chair
  
- Be Prepared: The Right Equipment
  
- Work as a Team

	Pre - Project				Post Project					Chi square 2x4 contingency table	Association between groups & outcomes	
n= 103	#1 Agree	#2 Strongly agree	#3 Disagree	#4 Strongly disagree	#1 Agree	#2 Strongly agree	#3 Disagree	#4 Strongly disagree		Chi-square statistic	p-value	Result is significant at p < .05
	n	n	n	n	n	n	n	n				
<b>Obese clients size is offensive to me; the larger the client, the more offensive</b>	42	31	19	11	7	11	45	40		61.5765	< 0.00001	significant
<b>Obese clients for the most part have a foul body odor</b>	34	41	16	12	4	8	48	43		79.3814	< 0.00001	significant
<b>Obese clients are usually sloppy in their appearance</b>	34	43	15	11	6	9	47	41		75.6546	< 0.00001	significant
<b>Obese clients are lazy with a lifestyle that lacks self-discipline.</b>	39	42	13	9	5	8	46	44		90.9636	< 0.00001	significant

- **Results-** Comparing the initial pre–post intervention
- **Pre-project** questionnaire - more than half had negative opinions.
- **Post project**
- Clinical groups had a **significant positive change** in their own weight prejudices after receiving obesity education.
- Students articulated **awareness** & actual **remorse** regarding their bias toward obese patients.



# Results – Post Intervention

## Positive changes with students and patients

Students expressed the new-found awareness of how weight-based discrimination

(1)negates patient-centered care (2) dramatically interferes with excellent delivery of care.

- Post intervention results revealed students' positive views of obese clients.
- Post intervention results revealed patients' positive views R/T students' favorable behavior.
- Students caring for obese patients were found to be:
  - More receptive
  - Less judgmental
  - Increased communication with patient and their needs
- Patients cared for by students were found to be interested in learning about their:
  - Illness
  - Treatments
  - Medications
- Students also became more engaged in teamwork, especially in support of using proper body mechanics to prevent nurse injuries

It has been said obesity is  
"the last socially acceptable form of  
prejudice"



"Most obese patients have experienced a  
lifetime of prejudice and discrimination"

## • CONCLUSION

- Discriminatory attitudes toward obese clients prevailed among
  - Nursing students
  - Both professional and nonprofessional staff
- Weight stigma is unacceptable and unethical.
- *Reaching nursing students during their formative years in education is crucial to modifying the stigma associated with plus size physiques.*

Promoting empathetic care of obese patients will positively impact their health and well being

Even if their weight remains unchanged...

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“They may forget  
your name, but  
they will never  
forget how you  
made them feel.”

- Maya Angelou

**Thank you for  
your attention**

