Norms, stigma and motivation; a cross national study

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Research Questions

1. Are differences in obesity / overweight prevalence reflected in perceptions of norms?

2. Does stigma decrease when (descriptive) norms increase?

3. Is stigma experienced as a form of social control; reflected in reduced need satisfaction and autonomous motivation, and increased controlled motivation to act?

4. Does stigma operate differently among normal vs overweight adults (i.e., deterrent vs immobiliser)?
Proposed model

Actual differences in prevalence

Perception of the environment

Perceived social response

Psychological need satisfaction

Motivation

National prevalence obesity / overweight

Descriptive norms (DN)

Injunctive norms (IN)

Stigma

Dislike

Fear of fat

 Attribution

Autonomy

Competence

Relatedness

Psychological need satisfaction

Motivation

Autonomous motivation

for weight control behaviours

Controlled motivation

for weight control behaviours

Attribution

Perception of the environment

Psychological need satisfaction

Motivation

Autonomous motivation

for weight control behaviours

Controlled motivation

for weight control behaviours
Participants

- Representative sample from national panels, completed online questionnaire in June 2016

- 504 participants (253 UK, 251 NL)
  - 47% female, $M$ age 46 years, mean BMI = 26 (SD=5)

- No difference in BMI between samples:
  - UK 26.42 (SD=5.75)  NL 26.02 (SD=4.99)

- Norms measured through bespoke CGI rating scale:
Research Question 1:

Differences between countries

- Attributions
- Fear of fat
- Dislike
- Stigma (combined)
- Injunctive norms
- Descriptive norms

Comparison between NL and UK:

- * indicates significant difference
Model testing: associations

COMPARING WEIGHT GROUPS (controlling for country)

- Overweight only
  - injunctive norms associated with fear of fat ($r = -0.17, p<0.01$)

- Non-overweight only
  - descriptive norms associated with fear of fat ($r = +0.15, p<0.05$)
R^2=0.27 (F=46.06, df=499; p<.001)

Direct effect: 0.12 (CI 0.07 to 0.18)

Total Indirect effects: 0.11 (CI 0.07 to 0.15)
Influence on motivation?

R²=0.35 (F=65.59, df=499; p<.001)

Direct effect: 0.43 (CI 0.37 to 0.50)

Total Indirect effects: 0.04 (CI 0.01 to 0.07)
Summary

- Effects of stigma appeared partially mediated through need satisfaction

- Stigma had a positive effect on need satisfaction

- Stigma has a direct, positive, effect on both autonomous and controlled motivation
Could stigma motivate action when a deterrent, but avoidance for those already overweight?

Overweight people (n=267)
- No differences in model for autonomous motivation
- Model for controlled motivation same but stronger (i.e., all mediated pathways significant)

Non-overweight people (n=237)
- Similar direct effects
- No relationship between stigma and competence
- Effect on autonomous M partially mediated through autonomy
- Effect on controlled M partially mediated through relatedness
Discussion/Future directions

• No evidence that obesity prevalence influences stigma through shifting descriptive norms

• Injunctive norms stronger driver of stigma than descriptive

• Methodological consideration in exploring differences from past work;
  • stigma measure: experience vs attitudes
  • motivation for weight loss vs diet or physical activity
Discussion/Future directions

• No evidence that obesity prevalence influences stigma through shifting descriptive norms

• Injunctive norms stronger driver of stigma than descriptive

• Methodological consideration in exploring differences from past work

• Stigma influences on need satisfaction warrant further exploring;
  • Autonomy effect due to internalisation of stigma?
  • Competence effect due to causal attributions, &/or rejection of stigmatised attributions (e.g., laziness)?
Thank you!

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Images obtained from the World Obesity Federation image bank; © World Obesity
Providing positive images to challenge obesity stereotypes in the media.... try them!
http://easo.org/media-portal/obesity-image-bank/
http://www.imagebank.worldobesity.org/