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**For Immediate Release: April 24, 2018**

## **Men May Experience Weight Stigma at Rates Similar to Women**

### *First Comprehensive Analysis of Weight Stigma Exclusively in Men*

**Hartford, Conn.** – Negative biases against people with obesity are widespread and can contribute to physical and emotional health problems. Studies of weight stigma often focus on women and indicate that women experience weight stigma more than men.

Recent evidence, however, suggests the gap between men and women in experiencing weight stigma may be smaller than previously thought. Yet little research has been conducted on weight stigma in men exclusively – until now.

A new study of weight stigma in men by the Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity at the University of Connecticut found that a significant portion of adult American men reported being mistreated about their weight. The findings suggest that men may be experiencing weight stigma at similar rates relative to women.

“Given the popular notion that concerns about body weight and weight stigma are primarily ‘women’s issues,’ our study highlights the importance of recognizing weight stigma as a problem that both men and women experience,” said Mary Himmelstein, a UConn Rudd Center Postdoctoral Fellow and lead author of the study.

The study, published today in the journal *Obesity*, is the first comprehensive analysis of weight stigma in men exclusively. The research involved three groups of men: 1,244 men from a diverse national survey panel; 233 men from a national online data collection service; and 36 male members of the Obesity Action Coalition who have struggled with their weight.

The 1,513 participants completed online surveys between July 2015 and October 2016. In all three samples, men answered questions about their demographic characteristics, weight status and dieting behavior, and history of experiencing weight stigma.

Key findings of the new study include:

- About 40 percent of men across all three samples reported experiencing weight stigma.
- Men who reported experiencing stigma were younger, less likely to be married, more likely to have obesity, and more likely to have tried to lose weight in the past year.

- Weight stigma occurred most often in adolescence and childhood, most commonly in the form of being verbally mistreated or teased about their weight. Peers, family members and strangers were the most common sources of this mistreatment.

Unlike women, who tend to experience more weight stigma as their body weight increases, men in this study reported experiencing the greatest stigma at body mass index (BMI) levels consistent with being underweight or having obesity, relative to normal weight and overweight.

“Our study shows that men should be included in studies of weight stigma as a vulnerable population instead of simply a comparison group to women,” Himmelstein said. “Given that most men reporting weight stigma in our study were actively trying to lose weight, our findings indicate there may be opportunities for supportive interventions to help men cope with weight stigma as part of weight management or weight loss programs.”

Support for this research was provided by the Rudd Foundation.

Study co-authors include Rebecca Puhl, Deputy Director of the UConn Rudd Center and Professor of Human Development and Family Studies, and Diane Quinn, Professor in the Department of Psychological Sciences at the University of Connecticut.

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### **About the UConn Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity**

The Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity at the University of Connecticut is a distinguished multi-disciplinary policy research center dedicated to promoting solutions to childhood obesity, poor diet, and weight bias through research and policy. The Rudd Center is a leader in building broad-based consensus to change diet by conducting research and educating policy makers and the public. For more information, visit [www.uconnruddcenter.org](http://www.uconnruddcenter.org) or follow us on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/uconnruddcenter](https://www.twitter.com/uconnruddcenter) or on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/uconnruddcenter](https://www.facebook.com/uconnruddcenter).