



Uniformed Services University
of the Health Sciences
4301 Jones Bridge Road
Bethesda, MD 20814-4799

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Contact: Sharon Holland, Office of
External Affairs

Email: sharon.holland@usuhs.edu

Nearly one-half of service members with overweight/obesity report weight stigma

Bethesda, MD – Weight discrimination is a major issue in our society and in the U.S. military, service members are not immune to it. According to a new study published Sept. 26 in the APA journal, *Stigma and Health*, nearly 50 percent of service members who are overweight or obese have experienced it.

Researchers from the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (USU), in Bethesda, Md., Madigan Army Medical Center, in Fort Lewis, Wash., and the Oregon Research Institute, in Eugene, Ore., conducted a study, “Weight Stigma among Active Duty U.S. Military Personnel with Overweight and Obesity.” They interviewed and surveyed 119 active duty service members with overweight or obesity, asking them about weight stigma, mood, eating and coping behaviors. Forty-nine percent of participants had experienced weight stigma at least once in the military, for instance, being denied an award or promotion due to weight/shape, or being mocked during training or drills.

Additionally, among those who reported stigma in the military based on any characteristic, weight (71 percent) and shape (61 percent) were the two most commonly stigmatized attributes. Those who had experienced weight stigma in the military were also more likely to report symptoms of depression, emotional eating, internalization of weight bias, and unhealthy coping behaviors, including laxative misuse and purging.

“These findings indicate that weight stigma may be quite common within the military, and that weight stigma in the military is associated with poorer psychological health, including depressive symptoms, unhealthy weight control behaviors, and eating in response to negative affect,” said USU’s Natasha Schvey, Ph.D., the study’s lead author.

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About the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences

The Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, founded by an act of Congress in 1972, is the nation’s federal health sciences university and the academic heart of the Military Health System. USU students are primarily active duty uniformed officers in the Army, Navy, Air Force and Public Health Service who receive specialized education in tropical and infectious diseases, TBI and PTSD, disaster response and humanitarian assistance, global health, and acute trauma care. A large percentage of the university’s more than 5,300 physician and 1,000 advanced practice nursing alumni are supporting operations around the world, offering their leadership and expertise. USU also has graduate programs in biomedical sciences and public health committed to excellence in research, and in oral biology. The

University's research program covers a wide range of clinical and other topics important to both the military and public health. For more information about USU and its programs, visit www.usuhs.edu.