



Contact: Daniel P. Jones, 860-380-1282, cell 203-605-5152 or daniel.p.jones@uconn.edu
For Immediate Release: May 3, 2017

Adolescents Teased About Their Weight Are More Likely To Have Obesity and Weight-related Health Consequences As Adults

Hartford, Conn. – Weight-based teasing is one of the most common forms of bullying that youth face. It most often comes from peers, but youth can also experience weight-based bullying from family members at home.

These experiences can contribute to emotional and physical health problems for youth. But less is known about the long-term impact of weight-based bullying.

A new study from researchers at the Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity at the University of Connecticut and the School of Public Health at the University of Minnesota shows that weight-based teasing in adolescence predicts health consequences in adulthood, including obesity, unhealthy weight-control and eating behaviors, and poor body image.

The study, published today in *Preventive Medicine*, involved 1,774 adults in the most recent wave of Project EAT (Eating and Activity in Teens and Young Adults), a longitudinal study of ethnically and socio-economically diverse adolescent girls and boys who have been followed for 15 years through young adulthood, as they entered their 30s.

The study's key findings showed that women who had been teased about their weight in adolescence had greater odds of:

- Having obesity in adulthood (about twice as high as those not teased)
- Engaging in unhealthy weight control behaviors as adults
- Eating in response to emotional distress as adults (about twice as high)
- Being dissatisfied with their body image
- Dieting in the past year

The findings showed that men teased about their weight in adolescence had greater odds of:

- Having obesity as adults (about twice as high)
- Eating in response to emotional distress
- Lower body satisfaction

Importantly, the study findings also highlighted gender differences related to the source of teasing. For women, being teased about their weight by peers and family members in adolescence predicted health problems in adulthood. But for men, negative health outcomes were linked only to weight-based teasing from peers – not from family members.

“In addition to increasing awareness that weight-based teasing can have negative implications for future health outcomes, our findings suggest the need for broader anti-bullying initiatives that include both the school and family/home environments as targets for intervention,” said Rebecca Puhl, Deputy Director of the UConn Rudd Center, Professor of Human Development and Family Studies at the University of Connecticut, and lead author of the study.

“Health professionals working with youth and families may have unique opportunities to assess youth for their experiences of weight-based teasing, educate parents about the damaging health consequences of teasing, and offer families resources to support children and help them cope with weight-based teasing using healthy, effective strategies,” said Dianne Neumark-Sztainer, Professor in the University of Minnesota School of Public Health’s Division of Epidemiology and Community Health, co-author of the study, and Principal Investigator of Project EAT.

The study was funded by a grant from the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute of the National Institutes of Health.

Other study co-authors include Melanie Wall and Chen Chen of the Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University, S. Bryn Austin of the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public, and Marla Eisenberg of the University of Minnesota.

###

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 and activity patterns by conducting research and educating policy makers and the public. For more information, visit www.uconnruddcenter.org or follow us on Twitter at www.twitter.com/uconnruddcenter or on Facebook at www.facebook.com/uconnruddcenter.