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Four-Nation Study Shows Weight-Based Bullying Viewed as Most Prevalent Form of Bullying in Children

Hartford, Conn. – A new multi-national study by the Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity at the University of Connecticut found that weight-based bullying is viewed to be the most common form of bullying of children.

The survey of views among 2,866 adults in the United States, Canada, Iceland and Australia showed that “being fat” was perceived to be the most prevalent reason that children are bullied in their own country, compared with other reasons for bullying such as race or ethnicity, sexual orientation or religion.

“Given high rates of childhood obesity in these and many other countries, both school-level and policy-level remedies may be needed to address weight-based bullying on a broad level to improve quality of life for youth with obesity,” said Rebecca Puhl, Ph.D., the study’s lead author, professor in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies at UConn, and Deputy Director of the Rudd Center.

“Our study shows that there is substantial public support for these policy measures,” Puhl said.

Specific findings of the study, published in the journal Pediatric Obesity, revealed that:

- At least 70 percent of survey participants across all countries perceived weight-based bullying in youth as a common problem.

- At least 69 percent across all countries viewed weight-based bullying as a serious or very serious issue.

- Between 75 and 87 percent of participants across countries agreed that school-based efforts should promote awareness about weight-based bullying and implement policies to better protect students from weight-based bullying.
• At least 74 percent across countries supported government efforts to strengthen existing anti-bullying laws to include provisions to address weight-based bullying.

The findings also showed that there is public interest in having multiple groups address this problem. At least 60 percent (and as high as 94 percent) of participants across the four countries viewed schools, teachers, parents, healthcare providers and the government each having an important role in protecting youth from weight-based bullying. This suggests that survey participants view weight-based bullying as a problem that requires attention and intervention from multiple levels and sources, Puhl said.

“Our findings echo recent research from the U.S. showing that parents favor strengthening school-based policies and state laws to address weight-based bullying,” Puhl said. “The time may be ripe to implement school-level policy changes to ensure that vulnerable youth are protected.”

The study was conducted between February and July 2013. The four nations were selected for their comparable rates of adult overweight and obesity, as well as similarities in sociocultural values of thinness, parliamentary or congressional democracies, and other societal factors.

Study co-authors include Janet D. Latner of the University of Hawaii at Manoa; Kerry O’Brien of Monash University in Melbourne, Australia; Joerg Luedicke of the Rudd Center; Mary Forhan of the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Canada, and Sigrun Danielsdottir of the Directorate of Health in Reykjavik, Iceland.

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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 improving the world’s diet, preventing obesity and reducing weight stigma. 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](http://www.uconnruddcenter.org) or follow us on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/uconnruddcenter](http://www.twitter.com/uconnruddcenter) or on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/uconnruddcenter](http://www.facebook.com/uconnruddcenter).