

Children's views of body size, shape and weight: an updated systematic review of qualitative evidence. Protocol

Background

This review is being undertaken to inform policy development around the National Child Measurement Programme in England. Our previous review on this programme, on children's views and impacts of weight measurement, found that perceptions are complex and unpredictable, and are influenced both by specific features of implementation of interventions (e.g. privacy of measurement) and by prior views about weight and obesity (Lorenc et al. 2024). Perceptions also vary between different subgroups of children: in particular, children living with overweight or obesity are more likely to have negative views or experiences of weighing.

These findings indicate a need to address the broader context of children's experiences, for example how they understand concepts like 'overweight' or 'healthy weight', which could not be included in the previous review. Relevant contextual factors may include, for example:

- how children view body size and weight, and what meanings they attach to it;
- the experiences of children with overweight or obesity; and
- how these may vary between different groups of children, for example by age or gender.

A previous review by a team based at the EPPI-Centre, for which searches were conducted in 2008, covers this evidence (Rees et al. 2009). There is a clear need for an update to that review: a large amount of potentially relevant research has been published in the intervening period, and changes in policy and in the broader society (e.g. cultural shifts and changes in rates of child overweight) mean that older evidence may now be less relevant. While this review will not be a formal update of Rees et al. – since changes to available bibliographic sources mean it would be impossible to re-run the exact search – it will cover evidence since 2008, to avoid duplication of effort. Like the 2009 review, this review will focus on evidence from the UK to ensure relevance to the policy context.

Methods

The review protocol will be registered on PROSPERO before starting work. EPPI-Reviewer software will be used to manage data. The review question is:

- What is known from qualitative studies from the UK about how children aged 4-12 perceive body size, shape or weight?

Searching

We will search for research from international and UK-focussed bibliographic databases across health, psychology, education and social science domains, and from websites, theses repositories, and library catalogues for research published outside of journal articles (grey literature).

International sources: CINAHL, EMBASE, MEDLINE (healthcare and nursing); ERIC (education); PsycINFO (psychology); Social Science Citation Index and Emerging Sources Citation Index (Web of Science); ProQuest dissertations and Theses, Networked Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (NDLTD).

UK-rich sources: ASSIA, International Bibliography of Social Sciences, British Education Index, NSPCC library catalogue, Policy Commons, Health Management Information Consortium, Social Policy and Practice, Theses Collection Wales.

Websites searches will include: Association for the Study of Obesity, Community and Health Research Unit, National Elf Service, OpenGrey (Archived version), Schools Health Education Unit, gov.uk.

Focussed searches on the following academic search engines will be undertaken: BASE, Google Scholar and OpenAlex. We will undertake forward citation searches of the records of eligible studies using Scopus and OpenAlex.

Database searches will be structured around the following concepts:

- 1) Population: (children aged 4-12) body size
- 2) Phenomena: body size, body image, weight measurements, weight stigma, weight anxiety, weight satisfaction
- 3) Research focus: views, experiences, qualitative research design
- 4) Country: UK (for international sources)
- 5) Limits: publication date from 2008, English language, exclude conference abstracts

Preliminary searches indicate the relevant research sparsely present across databases, and therefore, we aim to run sensitive databases searches balanced with precision, rather than exhaustive searches. The search strategy is informed from testing terms on references from previous systematic reviews, including 500 references of research or people's views, of which over 150 are on obesity, weight management or body image.

A draft search strategy using Medline (OVID) is presented in the Appendix.

Screening

An initial sample of 10% of records (titles and abstracts) will be independently screened by two reviewers and differences resolved by discussion. If agreement is adequate at this stage, remaining records will be screened by one reviewer alone. Full texts of all references which meet the criteria will be retrieved and screened by two reviewers independently. The inclusion criteria will be as follows:

- 1) Does the study report substantive primary qualitative data?
Exclude document analysis / content analysis. Retain systematic reviews of qualitative studies for reference checking
- 2) Does the study report data from children or young people aged 4-16?
Include if either >50% of the population are children, or there is substantive identifiable data from children. Exclude studies only reporting parents' / teachers' views
- 3) Does the study report substantive data about body size, shape, weight or obesity, and/or the experiences of children with overweight or obesity?
Include studies of healthy eating / physical activity / general mental health only if there is substantive data on obesity / weight / body size or studies focus on children with obesity / overweight
Include studies of body image only if there is substantive data on obesity / weight / body size or studies focus on children with obesity / overweight

Include studies focused on weight measurement interventions only if there is substantive data on obesity / weight / body size

- 4) Was the study published in 2008 or later?
- 5) Was the study conducted in the UK?
- 6) Does the study report data from children aged 4-12?

Depending on the initial results and on further consultation with policy colleagues, we may introduce further criteria to focus the review at this stage. We may also retain records excluded at criterion (6), i.e. data about young people aged 13-16, and conduct a separate synthesis of this data; this will be confirmed after abstract screening is complete.

Quality assessment and data extraction

Study quality will be assessed using the CASP checklist for qualitative studies. We will extract contextual data on the studies including information on the setting, population and study methodology (sampling and recruitment, data collection, data analysis). Qualitative data will be coded line-by-line using the coding function in EPPI-Reviewer. All QA and data extraction will be carried out by one reviewer and checked in detail by a second.

Data synthesis

We will conduct a thematic qualitative synthesis using a grounded theory approach. Themes will be coded as they emerge from the data, with re-reading of the full data set to ensure all data are coded. We will not apply a formal *a priori* framework, although coding may be informed by the structure of the findings in the 2009 review.

References

- Lorenc, Theo, Helen Burchett, Preethy D'Souza, Helen Fulbright, Amanda Sowden, Katy Sutcliffe, and James Thomas. 2024. 'Psychosocial Consequences of Weight Monitoring in Children: Systematic Review and Policy Mapping'. London: EPPI Centre, Social Science Research Unit, UCL Institute of Education, University College London. <https://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/CMS/Portals/0/NCMP%20systematic%20review%20LO-141124.pdf>.
- Rees, Rebecca, Kathryn Oliver, Jenny Woodman, and James Thomas. 2009. 'Children's Views about Obesity, Body Size, Shape and Weight: A Systematic Review'. London: EPPI-Centre, Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London. <https://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/cms/Portals/0/Obesity%20Views%20Children%20R2009Rees.pdf?ver=2010-12-22-121209-040>.

Appendix: Medline search strategy

Database: Ovid MEDLINE(R) ALL <1946 to January 30, 2025>

Search Strategy:

- 1** ("young people*" or adolescent* or youth or pubertal or pubescent or "pre adolescent" or "Pre pubescent" or "pre pubertal" or teen* or preteen* or tweens or tweenage* or youth or youths or schoolboy* or schoolgirl* or "school aged" or "young person*" or juvenile* or "Boy" or "boys" or "child" or "children*" or "child's" or "Girl" or "girls" or "Minors" or "preadolescent" or "Prepubescent" or "schoolchild*" or pubescent or "early adolescent*").ti,ab,kf,ot,jw. (2192224)
- 2** exp Minors/ or exp child/ or exp Adolescent/ (3509687)
- 3** ((child* or adolescence*) not childbirth*).jw. (198483)

- 4 1 or 2 or 3 (4215243)
- 5 (Weight not "birth weight").ti. (109030)
- 6 ("anti-fat" or bodyweight or "obese" or "obesity" or "overweight" or "skinny" or "fatness" or "thinness" or "body image" or "body hatred" or "body positive" or "thin ideal*" or "fat ideal*").ti,ab,kf,ot. (474406)
- 7 ("body esteem" and ("weight" or height or fat or thin)).ti,ab,kf,ot. (278)
- 8 ((body adj2 ideal*) or (body adj2 shape) or (body adj2 shapes) or (body adj1 size)).ti,ab,kf,ot. (36277)
- 9 ((body adj10 weight) not (body adj10 "birth weight")).ti,ab,kf,ot. (295776)
- 10 ("underweight" not "birth weight").ti,ab,kf,ot. (15908)
- 11 ((weight adj1 bias) or (weight adj1 biases)).ti,ab,kf,ot. (825)
- 12 ("weight change" or "weight changes" or (weight adj2 gain*) or (weight adj2 loss) or "lose weight" or "losing weight" or (weight adj1 (reduc* or manage* or control*))).ti,ab,kf,ot. (236658)
- 13 ("weight adj1 measurement*" or "height adj1 measurement*").ti,ab,kf,ot. (0)
- 14 ("healthy weight" or "unhealthy weight" or "weight adj5 monitor*" or "height adj5 monitor*").ti,ab,kf,ot. (4949)
- 15 ("being measured" and ("weight" or weighing or height)).ti,ab,kf,ot. (139)
- 16 (weighing adj3 experiences).ti,ab,kf,ot. (7)
- 17 (weight screening* or height screening*).ti,ab,kf,ot. (67)
- 18 ("being fat" or "being weighed" or "Being thin" or "Being tall" or "Being short").ti,ab,kf,ot. (690)
- 19 ((stereotype or stereotypes or Stigma or stigmati* or ideals or ideal or discriminate* or discrimination or "peer pressure" or prejudice* or bully* or teasing or cyberbull* or bullied) adj5 ("fat" or weight or thin or height or tall or short or muscle* or muscular* or body)).ti,ab,kf,ot. (12664)
- 20 ((fat or weight or thin or body or height or muscle or muscular*) adj5 (acceptability or satisfaction or satisfied or dissatisfaction or dissatisfied or anxiety or anxious or angst or peer pressure or feelings or worries or worry or concern or concerns or "over concern" or emotions or emotion or concerns or "self-worth" or "self esteem" or esteem or "self-concept" or "self-identification" or "pre-occupation" or "preoccupation" or "acceptability" or perceiv* or understand* or perception* or internalis* or attitud*)).ti,ab,kf,ot. (41040)
- 21 (Body adj1 (dysmorph* or dismorph*)).ti,ab,kf,ot. (1717)
- 22 (Muscle adj1 (dysmorph* or dismorph*)).ti,ab,kf,ot. (291)
- 23 ((body or fat or thin or height or weight) adj3 (shame or phobia*)).ti,ab,kf,ot. (580)
- 24 ((weight adj2 muscle) or "excess weight").ti,ab,kf,ot. (11054)
- 25 ((weight adj3 appearance) or (height adj3 appearance)).ti,ab,kf,ot. (907)
- 26 5 or 6 or 7 or 8 or 9 or 10 or 11 or 12 or 13 or 14 or 15 or 16 or 17 or 18 or 19 or 20 or 21 or 22 or 23 or 24 or 25 (924493)
- 27 Body Dysmorphic Disorders/ or Weight Prejudice/ or "body size"/ or "body weight"/ or exp "ideal body weight"/ or "obesity"/ or "overweight"/ or exp "thinness"/ (454755)
- 28 body height/ (38739)
- 29 27 or 28 (473493)
- 30 26 or 29 (1089571)
- 31 4 and 30 (208890)
- 32 "attitude to health"/ or "comprehension"/ or "ethnopsychology"/ or "Focus Groups"/ or "Interviews as Topic"/ or Qualitative Research/ or "attitude"/ or Personal Narrative/ (327649)
- 33 ((Girls or Boys or Child* or teen* or adolescen* or "young people*" or schoolchild* or pupil* or student*) adj2 ("perspective*" or "experience*" or "lived experience*" or "attitude" or "attitudes" or "attitudinal" or "belief" or "beliefs" or "discourse" or "discourses" or "life-world" or

"opinions" or "standpoint" or "standpoints" or "understanding" or "understandings" or "viewpoint" or "viewpoints" or "views" or "voice" or "voices" or discussed or described* or drawings or drew)).ab. (74275)

34 ("audiorecording" or "ethnograph*" or "ethnolog*" or "ethnopsycholog*" or "ethnopsycholog*" or "Focus Groups" or "Focus Group" or "repertory grid*" or "stories" or "audio record" or "audio recorded" or "audio recorder" or "audio recording" or "audio recordings" or "audio records" or "thematic analysis" or "phenomenol*" or "grounded theory" or "grounded studies" or "grounded research" or "purposive sampling" or "biographical method" or "theoretical sampl*" or "conversation analysis" or "theoretical saturation" or "thematic analyses" or "mixed design" or "mixed method" or "mixed methods" or "qualitative" or "interviewed" or "interviewing" or "interviewer" or "interviews" or "interview" or "narratives" or "Diary entries" or "diary study" or Diaries or journalling or (Questions* adj5 (semi-structured, or in-depth or open or "open ended")) or "Group discussion*").ti,ab,kf,ot. (864508)

35 ("experiences" or "lived experience*" or "perceptions" or "perspective" or "perspectives" or "experience" or "attitude" or "attitudes" or "attitudinal" or "belief" or "beliefs" or "discourse" or "discourses" or "life-world" or "opinions" or "perceived" or "perception" or "standpoint" or "standpoints" or "understanding" or "understandings" or "viewpoint" or "viewpoints" or "views" or "voice" or "voices" or talk*).ti,ot,kf. (952566)

36 32 or 33 or 34 or 35 (1812166)

37 4 and 30 and 36 (20780)

38 exp United Kingdom/ (402174)

39 (England not "New England").ti,ab,kf,ot,in,jw. (160806)

40 ("district council" or "local council" or "local authorities" or "NHS Trust" or "primary care trust" or "borough council" or "county council" or "local authority" or "district councils" or "local councils" or "NHS Trusts" or "primary care trusts" or "borough councils" or "county councils" or "Social Care Trust").ti,ab,ot,kf,in. (111776)

41 ("United Kingdom" or UK or "U.K." or Britain or GB or (British not "British Columbia")).ti,ab,ot,kf,in,jw. (2487990)

42 (Welsh or Scottish or "northern Irish" or Wales or Scotland or "northern Ireland").ti,ab,ot,kf,in,jw. (319223)

43 (national health service* or nhs*).ti,ab,in. (307965)

44 (english not ((published or publication* or translat* or written or language* or speak* or literature or citation*) adj5 english)).ti,ab. (139395)

45 (bath or "bath's" or ((birmingham not alabama*) or ("birmingham's" not alabama*) or bradford or "bradford's" or brighton or "brighton's" or bristol or "bristol's" or carlisle* or "carlisle's" or (cambridge not (massachusetts* or boston* or harvard*)) or ("cambridge's" not (massachusetts* or boston* or harvard*)) or (canterbury not zealand*) or ("canterbury's" not zealand*) or chelmsford or "chelmsford's" or chester or "chester's" or chichester or "chichester's" or coventry or "coventry's" or derby or "derby's" or (durham not (carolina* or nc)) or ("durham's" not (carolina* or nc)) or ely or "ely's" or exeter or "exeter's" or gloucester or "gloucester's" or hereford or "hereford's" or hull or "hull's" or lancaster or "lancaster's" or leeds* or leicester or "leicester's" or (lincoln not nebraska*) or ("lincoln's" not nebraska*) or (liverpool not (new south wales* or nsw)) or ("liverpool's" not (new south wales* or nsw)) or ((london not (ontario* or ont or toronto*)) or ("london's" not (ontario* or ont or toronto*)) or manchester or "manchester's" or (newcastle not (new south wales* or nsw)) or ("newcastle's" not (new south wales* or nsw)) or norwich or "norwich's" or nottingham or "nottingham's" or oxford or "oxford's" or peterborough or "peterborough's" or plymouth or "plymouth's" or portsmouth or "portsmouth's" or preston or "preston's" or ripon or "ripon's" or salford or "salford's" or salisbury

or "salisbury's" or sheffield or "sheffield's" or southampton or "southampton's" or st albans or stoke or "stoke's" or sunderland or "sunderland's" or truro or "truro's" or wakefield or "wakefield's" or wells or westminster or "westminster's" or winchester or "winchester's" or wolverhampton or "wolverhampton's" or (worchester not (massachusetts* or boston* or harvard*)) or ("worchester's" not (massachusetts* or boston* or harvard*)) or (york not ("new york*" or ny or ontario* or ont or toronto*)) or ("york's" not ("new york*" or ny or ontario* or ont or toronto*))))).ti,ab,in. (1914200)

46 (aberdeen or "aberdeen's" or dundee or "dundee's" or edinburgh or "edinburgh's" or glasgow or "glasgow's" or inverness or (perth not australia*) or ("perth's" not australia*) or stirling or "stirling's").ti,ab,in. (281610)

47 (armagh or "armagh's" or belfast or "belfast's" or lisburn or "lisburn's" or londonderry or "londonderry's" or derry or "derry's" or newry or "newry's").ti,ab,in. (37724)

48 ("South Holland" or Aldershot or Ashfield or Barking or Barnet or Barnsley or Bedfordshire or Bexley or Birkenhead or Blackburn or Blackpool or Bolton or Bournemouth or Brent or Bridgend or Bromley or Bromwich or Buckinghamshire or Burnley or Camberwell or Cambridgeshire or Camden or Chelsea or Chelsea or Cheshire or Cleveland or Colchester or Cornwall or Crawley or Croydon or Cumbria or Dagenham or Dartford or Derbyshire or Devon or Doncaster or Dorset or Dudley or Ealing or Ealing or Eastbourne or Enfield or Essex or Farnborough or Fulham or Furness or Galloway or Gateshead or Glamorgan or Glasgow or Gloucestershire or Gravesham or Greenwich or Grimsby or Guildford or Hackney or Hamlets or Hammersmith or Hampshire or Haringey or Haringey or Harrow or Hartlepool or Harwell or Hastings or Havering or Helens or Hertfordshire or Highland or Hillingdon or Hounslow or Hounslow or Hove or Huddersfield or Humber or Ipswich or Islington or Kensington or Kent or Kingston or Kirklees or Knowsley or Lambeth or Lancashire or Leicestershire or Lewisham or Lichfield or Lincoln or Lincolnshire or Loughborough or Luton or Lynn or Mansfield or Merseyside or Merton or Middlesbrough or Midlands or Milton Keynes or Newcastle or Newham or Norfolk or Northampton or Northamptonshire or Northumberland or Nottinghamshire or Oadby or Oldham or Oxfordshire or Poole or Portsmouth or Reading or Redbridge or Redcar or Richmond or Rochdale or Rotherham or Rushmoor or Sandwell or Scarborough or Scilly or Shropshire or Slough or Solihull or Somerset or Southampton or Southend or Southwark or Staffordshire or Stockport or Stockton or Suffolk or Surrey or Sussex or Sutton or Swindon or Teesside or Telford or Thurrock or Tower Hamlets or Tyne or Tyneside or Walsall or Waltham or Wandsworth or Warrington or Warwickshire or Watford or Wigan or Wight or Wigston or Wiltshire or Wirral or Woking or Worcestershire or Worthing or Yorkshire).ti,ab,kf,ot,in. (1301438)

49 ("Isle of Man" or "Channel Islands" or "Guernsey").ti,ab,kf,ot,in. (1477)

50 (bangor or "bangor's" or cardiff or "cardiff's" or newport or "newport's" or "st asaph" or "st asaph's" or "st davids" or swansea or "swansea's").ti,ab,in. (77715)

51 38 or 39 or 40 or 41 or 42 or 43 or 44 or 45 or 46 or 47 or 48 or 49 or 50 (4089151)

52 (exp africa/ or exp americas/ or exp antarctic regions/ or exp arctic regions/ or exp asia/ or exp australia/ or exp oceania/ or developing countries/) not (exp United Kingdom/ or europe/) (3559746)

53 51 not 52 (3762338)

54 37 and 53 (2883)

55 limit 54 to yr="2008 -Current" (2264)