



# Obesity and Attitudes Toward It

Fatbardha Osmanaga

<sup>1</sup> Department of Psychology and Social Work., Faculty of Education, University of “Luigj Gurakuqi” of Shkodër, Albania

**\*Corresponding Author:** [fosmanaga@unishk.edu.al](mailto:fosmanaga@unishk.edu.al)

**Abstract:** *Weight stigma is present in the world. Many obese people experience bias and discrimination at home, in community, at school, at work, etc. The consequences are very severe, because the psychological well-being of obese people is influenced by negative attitudes toward them. The main aim of the study is exploring anti-fat attitudes and fat phobia of students of Psychology study program (bachelor degree) of the Faculty of Educational Sciences at the University of “Luigj Gurakuqi” of Shkoder in Albania and exploring the correlation between their anti-fat attitudes and fat phobia. In the study, 124 students of Psychology study program (bachelor degree) were participated. The measuring instruments were: a) Anti-fat Attitudes Questionnaire (AFA), and b) Fat Phobia Scale. The paper concluded that the students of Psychology study program have obesity bias. They have not a high level of fat phobia. For the students of Psychology study program (bachelor degree), the improvement of their attitudes toward anti-fat and the improvement of their attitudes regarding obesity are necessary. This will, in the future, impact the quality of services for people. Other studies should be made in order to discover why the students have such attitudes toward obesity and to get the needed strategies in order to improve students’ attitudes toward obesity.*

**Keywords:** *Anti-Fat Attitudes, Fat Phobia, Obesity*

## INTRODUCTION

According to WHO (WHO, 2017), “Worldwide obesity has nearly tripled since 1975. In 2016, more than 1.9 billion adults, 18 years and older, were overweight. Of these over, 650 million were obese”.

Many studies have documented that stigma about obesity exists. As cited by Christel D.A. (2016), “Evidence suggests that weight bias has intensified in the US and is now reported to occur at higher rates than racism”. The research made by Public Health England in 2015 concluded that prejudices exist toward obese people, especially regarding their employment.

According to Rebecca Puhl, “Weight stigma refers to negative attitudes and beliefs about body weight that are expressed in the form of stereotypes, prejudice and unfair treatment towards people because they are overweight or obese (Puhl R., 2009).

## Methodology of the paper

There are made many studies about students’ attitudes toward obesity.

According to the study made by Sarikaya R., et al. at the University of Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart, the researchers concluded that the students have moderate levels of fat phobia (Sarikaya R., Ozturk H., Afyon Y.A., Turegun E. (2013).

The results of the study made with the medical students at the University of Leipzig, in Germany indicate that stigmatizing attitudes towards overweight and obesity are prevalent (Pantenburg B., Sikorski C., Lupp M., Schomerus G., König H., Werner P., Riedel-Heller S.G., 2012).

The results of the study made with students from East Tennessee State University, Middle Tennessee State University and students from Mississippi State University indicate that obesity bias was present (Welborn S.E., 2013).

The main aim of the study is exploring anti-fat attitudes and fat phobia of students of Psychology study program (bachelor degree) of the Faculty of Educational Sciences at the University of “Luigj Gurakuqi” of Shkoder in Albania and exploring the correlation between their anti-fat attitudes and fat phobia.

The research questions are:

- What are the attitudes toward obesity of students of Psychology study program (bachelor degree) of the Faculty of Educational Sciences?
- What is the correlation between their anti-fat attitudes and fat phobia?

**Sampling.** In the study, 124 students of Psychology study program (bachelor degree) were participated. 46 students (37.09% of the students that participated in the study) are at the first academic course, 41 students (33.06%) are at the second academic course and 37 students (29.83%) are at the third academic course. 112 students (90.3%) are female, and 12 students (9.7%) are male. Their age varies from 18 years aged (16 students) to 32 years aged (1 student). The students live mainly at the Nord of Albania, in Ulqin (in Montenegro) and in Kosovo. 72 students (58.1%) live in Shkoder, 3 students (2.4%) live in Kukes district, 4 students (3.2%) live in Mirdite district, 4 students (3.2%) live in Dibra district, 5 students (4%) live in Ulqin district, 1 student (0.8%) lives in Durres district, 1 student (0.8%) lives in Presheve district (Kosovo), 1 student (0.8%) lives in Mat district, 2 students (1.6%) live in Has district, 1 student (0.8%) lives in Malesi e Madhe district, 1 student (0.8%) lives in Tropoja district, 18 students (14.5%) live in Lezha district, 4 students (3.2%) live in Puka district, 2 students (1.6%) live in Tirana district, 1 student (0.8%) lives in Mamurras district and 4 students (3.2%) did not mention the district where they live.

**Apparatus/Materials.** The measuring instruments are: a) Anti-fat Attitudes Questionnaire (AFA), and b) Fat Phobia Scale.

The AFA is scored using a Likert-type response format (0 = very strongly disagree; 9 = very strongly agree). Higher scores indicate stronger anti-fat attitudes (Crandall, C.S., 1994).

The survey is comprised of three subscales, Dislike (subjects' prejudice toward fat people), Fear of Fat (concerns regarding your own weight), and Willpower (beliefs about the controllability of weight) (Felts E.J., 2007).

In order to measure students' attitudes about obesity, a revised version of the Fat Phobia Scale was used. This 14-item scale is a shortened version of the original 50-item fat phobia scale; it measures a person's attitudes regarding obese people using a scoring range from 1 to 5. The original 50-item fat phobia scale was validated in 1984 when the 6 distinct fat phobia subscales were determined. Fat phobia scores for each participant were calculated by adding up the score for each item to get a total score. The total score was then divided by 14 to obtain an average range of 1 to 5. A score of 2.5 indicates a neutral attitude about obese people. Scores that fall below 2.5 indicate positive attitudes about obese people, whereas scores that fall above 2.5 indicate negative attitudes regarding the obese population (Bacon JG, Scheltema KE, Robinson BE, 2001) (cited by Welborn S.E, 2013).

The administration of the questionnaires (distribution and collection) was conducted during February 2017.

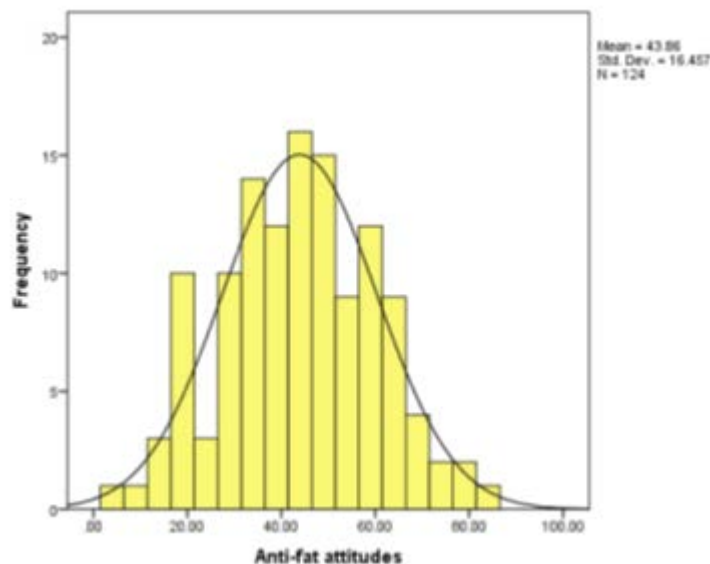
**Method of analysis.** The data collected was analyzed by means of the SPSS program, variant 20. The internal reliability, Alpha Cronbach coefficient=0, 767 for the Fat Phobia Scale.

## Findings of the study

### General data concerning students' anti-fat attitudes

**Table 1.** Data about students' anti-fat attitudes

	N	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Anti-fat attitudes	124	43.86	44.50	43	16.45	4	83
Valid	124						



**Graph 1.** Data about students' anti-fat attitudes

The mean is 43.86, the median is 44.50 and the mode is 43. The maximum score obtained is 83 (obtained from 1 student or 0.8% of students), the minimum score obtained is 4 (obtained from 1 student or 0.8% of students). The scores from 4 to 40 have been obtained from 53 students (42, 8% of the students that are part of this study). The scores from 41 to 83 have been obtained from 71 students (57, 2% of the students that are part of this study). So, the students have anti-fat attitudes, but their anti-fat attitudes are not so strong.

**Table 2.** Data about the three subscales

	N	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Dislike	124	16.75	16	9	9.88	0	47
Fear of Fat	124	12.75	12	16	7.46	0	27
Willpower	124	14.35	15	17	5.22	0	27
Valid	124						

Regarding the *Dislike* Subscale, we have these data: The mean is 16.75, the median is 16 and the mode is 9. The maximum score obtained is 47 (obtained from 1 student or 0.8% of students), and the minimum score obtained is 0 (obtained from 3 student or 2.4% of students). The students have prejudices about obese people, but not much.

Regarding the *Fear of Fat* Subscale, we have these data: The mean is 12.75, the median is 12 and the mode is 16. The maximum score obtained is 27 (obtained from 3 students or 2.4% of students), and the minimum score obtained is 0 (obtained from 8 students or 6.4% of students). The concerns of students about their weight are not problematic.

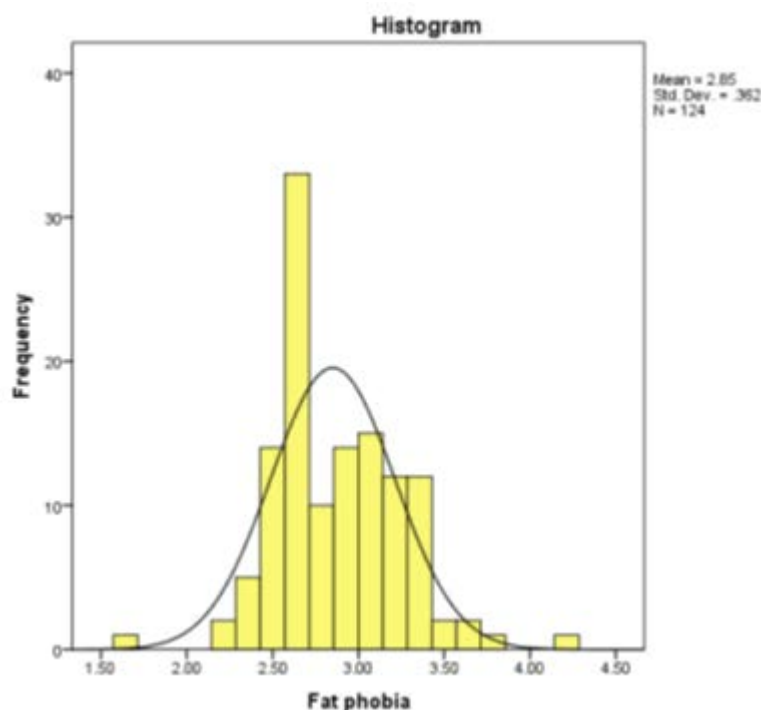
Regarding the *Willpower* Subscale, we have these data: The mean is 14.35, the median is 15 and the mode is 17. The maximum score obtained is 27 (obtained from 1 student or 0.8% of students), and the minimum score obtained is 0 (obtained from 1 student or 0.8% of students). The students do not strongly believe on their ability to control their weight.

#### General data concerning students' fat phobia

**Table 3.** Data about students' fat phobia

	N	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Fat Phobia		2.85	2.78	2.64	0.36	1.64	4.21
Valid	124						

The mean is 2.85, the median is 2.78 and the mode is 2.64. The maximum score obtained is 4.21 (obtained from 1 student or 0.8% of students), and the minimum score obtained is 1.64 (obtained from 1 student or 0.8% of students).



**Graph 2.** Data about students' fat phobia

The scores from 1.64 to 2.43 have been obtained from 14 students (11, 2% of the students that participated on this study). The score of 2.5 has been obtained from 8 students (6, 4%). The scores from 2.57 to 4.21 have been obtained from 102 students (82, 2%). A small part of the students (14 students) has positive attitudes about obese people. A very small part of the students (8 students) has a neutral attitude about obese people. The others (102 students) have negative attitudes.

#### General data concerning the correlation between students' anti-fat attitudes and their fat phobia

There is a negative correlation between students' anti-fat attitudes and their fat phobia (Pearson correlation = -0.01). This relationship is very weak.

### General data concerning the correlation between the three subscales of AFA Questionnaire and students' anti-fat attitudes

There is a positive correlation between students' anti-fat attitudes and the Dislike Subscale (students' prejudice toward fat people), Pearson correlation= 0.8. The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

There is positive correlation between students' anti-fat attitudes and the Fear of Fat Subscale (students' concerns regarding their own weight), Pearson correlation= 0.7. The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

There is a positive correlation between students' anti-fat attitudes and the Willpower Subscale (students' beliefs about their ability to control their weight), Pearson correlation= 0.6. The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

### General data concerning the correlation between the three subscales of AFA Questionnaire

There is a positive correlation between Dislike Subscale scores and Fear of Fat Subscale scores, Pearson correlation= 0.2. The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

There is a positive correlation between Dislike Subscale scores and Willpower Subscale scores, Pearson correlation= 0.2. The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

There is a positive correlation between Fear of Fat Subscale scores and Willpower Subscale scores, Pearson correlation= 0.3. The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

### General data concerning the correlation between the specific academic courses on mean AFA Questionnaire score of students and on mean Fat Phobia Scale score of students

**Table 4.** The correlation between the specific academic course on mean AFA Questionnaire score of students

Academic course	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
First academic course	46	40.91	17.19	10.00	83.00
Second academic course	41	44.26	16.31	4.00	77.00
Third academic course	37	47.08	15.43	14.00	78.00
Total	124	43.86	16.45	4.00	83.00
Valid	124				

There is not a significant relationship between the specific academic course on mean AFA Questionnaire score of students (Sig=0,234). As we can see from table 3, the students of the third academic course have a higher average of points (47.08); whereas, the students of the first academic course have a lower average of points (40.91), but this relationship is not statistically significant. So, the students of the third academic course have less favorable attitudes, but the students' academic course does not impact their attitudes toward anti-fat.

**Table 5.** The relationship between the specific academic course on mean Fat Phobia Scale score of students

Academic course	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
First academic course	46	2.83	0.41	1.64	4.21
Second academic course	41	2.86	0.31	2.14	3.50
Third academic course	37	2.85	0.34	2.36	3.71
Total	124	2.85	0.36	1.64	4.21
Valid	124				

There is not a significant relationship between the specific academic course on mean Fat Phobia Scale score of students (Sig=0,951). As we can see from table 4, the students of the second academic course have more negative attitudes regarding the obese people, but this relationship is not statistically significant.

## Conclusion

The paper concluded that the students of Psychology study program have anti-fat attitudes, but their anti-fat attitudes are not so strong. The students have negative attitudes about obese people.

The students have prejudices about obese people, but not much. The concerns of students about their weight are not problematic. The students do not strongly believe on their ability to control their weight.

There is negative correlation between students' anti-fat attitudes and their fat phobia. This relationship is very weak.

There is a positive correlation between students' anti-fat attitudes and the Dislike Subscale. There is a positive correlation between students' anti-fat attitudes and the Fear of Fat Subscale (students' concerns regarding their own weight). There is a positive correlation between students' anti-fat attitudes and the Willpower Subscale (students' beliefs about their ability to control their weight). There is a positive correlation between Dislike Subscale scores and Fear of Fat Subscale scores. There is a positive correlation between Dislike Subscale scores and Willpower Subscale scores. There is a positive correlation between Fear of Fat Subscale scores and Willpower Subscale scores.

There is not a significant relationship between the specific academic course on mean AFA Questionnaire score of students. The students of the third academic course have a higher average of points; whereas, the students of the first academic course have a lower average of points, but this relationship is not statistically significant. There is not a significant relationship between the specific academic course on mean Fat Phobia Scale score of students. The students of the second academic course have more negative attitudes regarding the obese people, but this relationship is not statistically significant.

## Recommendations

For the students of Psychology study program (bachelor degree), the improvement of their attitudes toward anti-fat and the improvement of their attitudes regarding obesity are necessary. This will, in the future, impact the quality of services for people. Other studies should be made in order to discover why the students have such attitudes toward obesity and to get the needed strategies in order to improve students' attitudes toward obesity.

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