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RESEARCH TENDER CALL

TENDER INFORMATION DOCUMENT

Project Reference No.: 03-2025


Project Title: Understanding weight stigma and current discourses in relation to overweight and obesity on the island of Ireland

1. *Background*

Addressing obesity is a key public health priority across the island of Ireland with two in three of adults (1) and one in five children (2) in Ireland and one in four in Northern Ireland living with overweight and obesity (3). People living with overweight, and obesity often experience weight bias, stigma, and discrimination. This happens across society including in the education setting, in the workplace, in the media, on the sports field and within family and friend groups. Stigma has a profound effect on how people are seen, treated and may lead to health inequalities for people living with overweight and obesity (4).

The All-island Obesity Action Forum, a community of professionals who have a common interest in obesity prevention and treatment and that provides a platform for partnership and cohesive working on the island of Ireland, has committed to actions to discourage stigmatising attitudes and reduce weight bias (<https://www.safefood.net/obesity-action-forum/statement>).

Weight stigma includes the negative social stereotypes, misconceptions and negative behaviours, attitudes and beliefs in relation to people living with overweight and obesity because of their weight and/or body size. Experiencing stigma is linked with anxiety, lower self-esteem, social isolation, unhealthy eating and weight-control behaviours and higher exercise avoidance. Weight stigma is a major obstacle in preventing and addressing rising obesity prevalence and


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commonly results in the implementation of dispersed, ineffective policies and a lack of prioritisation (5, 6).

The way in which overweight and obesity are portrayed in the media is extremely influential in forming public perceptions and beliefs about those living with overweight and obesity (7). Media representation impacts behaviours, intentions and outcomes and may increase risk for long-term negative health consequences (8). The framing and portrayal of overweight and obesity in Ireland in the media was examined in 2011, that found a significant increase of coverage of the topic of obesity from 1997 to 2009 (9, 10). A framing analysis during the same time found that the behaviour narrative was dominant (11). Baker et al found that the amount of reporting on obesity in UK national press articles doubled between 2008 and 2017. During the study period newspapers increasingly emphasised individual factors like biology and personal choice when writing about obesity while there was a decrease in emphasis on political and social factors. These authors concluded that the newspaper depictions run counter to the Government's Foresight Report in 2007 and that these depictions are likely to result in increased stigma and discrimination of people with obesity in the UK (12).

A number of frameworks and best practice guidelines have been published including:

- World Health Organization (2017) Weight bias and obesity stigma: considerations for the WHO European Region
- [Changing the global obesity narrative to recognize and reduce weight stigma: A position statement from the World Obesity Federation - Nutter - 2024 - Obesity Reviews - Wiley Online Library](#) (2023)
- Addressing weight stigma and misconceptions about obesity: Building a youth-led response
[https://www.worldobesity.org/downloads/healthy voices downloads/WOF Stigma Youth Briefing 21 Dec.pdf](https://www.worldobesity.org/downloads/healthy%20voices%20downloads/WOF%20Stigma%20Youth%20Briefing%2021%20Dec.pdf)
- <https://www.safefood.net/obesity-action-forum/statement> (2023)
- <https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/cspd/ncps/obesity/model-of-care/>
- [Reducing Weight Bias in Obesity Management, Practice & Policy - Obesity Canada](#) (2020) <https://www.cmaj.ca/content/192/31/E875>

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Despite these frameworks, a recent systematic review found that weight stigma in media content is prevalent and harmful, but that there is little guidance on reducing it. The review highlighted that weight stigma was prevalent across media types, with the dominant discourse viewing overweight and obesity as an individual responsibility and overlooking systemic factors. Exposure to stigmatising content was found to negatively influence attitudes towards people with overweight or obesity. The review also found that few studies considered methods of reducing stigma in the media and recommended that the future research focus needs to shift from assessing prevalence and impacts to weight stigma interventions (13).

2. Objective/Knowledge Gap

Obesity stigma refers to the negative attitudes and beliefs associated with obesity including bias, discrimination, stereotyping and social exclusion. This stigma is pervasive in society with people living with obesity and overweight experiencing stigma across a number of settings including healthcare, education, the workplace, in social settings including sports, the media and in personal relationships. Research shows that there are many physical and mental health consequences of experiencing obesity and overweight stigma. This project aims to explore current discourses on weight stigma (both obesity and overweight) and explore if and how they have changed over the last 15 years in at policy level and in the media, on the island of Ireland. This project is intended to build on the significant volume of published work in this area and the many best practice frameworks and guidelines that have been published. This project is also being commissioned to identify practical approaches to reducing weight stigma in the communications domain.

The key objectives of this research project are to:

- Provide up to date evidence on how overweight and obesity are framed in policy documents and in broadcast, non-broadcast and social media on the island of Ireland
- Identify where obesity and overweight feature in public policy and implementation documentation.
- Assess the language used in relation to current standards of best practice in relation to stigma reduction and examine how obesity and overweight are framed.

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- To review the impact of best practice frameworks and guidelines on reducing stigma on the discourse and the barriers that remain to fully complying with best practice in avoiding weight related stigma.
- Investigate key stakeholders general understanding and perception of overweight and obesity using qualitative research. These stakeholders include:
 - Healthcare
 - Education
 - Workplace
 - sporting bodies
 - policy representatives
 - media representatives
 - community representatives
 - members of the public
 - patient representatives
 - people who are living with or caring for, or are a parent of a person living with overweight or obesity
- Propose recommendations on how the relevant best practice guidelines can be improved, used or implemented to reduce weight-related stigma in policy and media on the island of Ireland.

3. **Approach**


The aims and objectives of the current research can be met by using a mixture of methods. Applications must demonstrate how the approach and methods used will specifically address the requirements. All applications must outline in detail the theoretical framework that will be used and how it will be used to inform the research and the methods

4. **Technical Specification**

(a) Scope of research

The research should:

- Include a focus on public perspectives and the use of qualitative methods at an early stage in the research project to inform the approach.

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- Consider policy documents published over a period of at least 15 years with direct and indirect relevance to overweight and obesity.
- Consider broadcast and non-broadcast media content over a period of at least 5 years.
- Include social media and video sharing content using an appropriate timeframe and justification for sampling and channel selection.
- Assess both text and imagery. Specifically, applications should detail how images will be sourced and considered.
- Take account of the wide range of settings in which stigma is experienced
- Consider how the drivers of overweight and obesity were described and framed, and which solutions were favoured by the different actors.
- Consider how the stories were placed and how they played out over time including across media platforms.
- Include specific consideration in respect of the perspective of young people and gender considerations.
- Ensure that public participants in the qualitative work represent different agendas including those with lived experience of overweight and obesity in addition to those who live with and care for children and adults living with overweight and obesity and those with no lived experience. There should be a clear justification for the sampling framework used.
- Be collaborative across a number of relevant disciplines with justification for inclusion of all parties, including experts in public health, policy, content analysis and communications and other relevant fields.
- Detail how the public voice will be included in the research project including aspects such representation in the steering group, recruitment and selection.

It should be noted that SafeFood is not an active participant in the project and sole responsibility lies with the successful tenderer.

(b) Literature review

The project methodology and findings should be informed by existing literature in this area.

(c) Research methods

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A full justification and rationale for the proposed methodology and analytical approach will be required. It is also important that the adaptation of methods to the island of Ireland context be clearly outlined. It will be necessary to indicate for all aspects of the project how the proposed data will be collected, analysed and reported.

(d) Outline of proposed data sources

For this study, different data sources will be required. The researcher must list the sources they intend to use and demonstrate access and experience in the use of the proposed data sources, as well as the relevant permissions to do so. The data sources will include data from:

- Relevant policy documents
- Media content to build a dataset of relevant national and local newspaper articles and broadcast media pieces including national and local television and radio broadcasts
- Media content analysis of an appropriate and selected frame of social media sources
- Focus groups and/or qualitative methods with key stakeholders


(e) Analysis

A full and detailed methodology must be provided on how the data sources are going to be identified, utilised, analysed and interpreted to meet the objectives of the project.

(f) Data handling and Reporting

- The contractor will submit to SafeFood, on a six-monthly basis, an interim report containing details of the progress for each deliverable of the project
- The contractor is responsible for collating all results and a final report will be submitted to SafeFood on completion of the study
- All forms, documentation and electronic files must be retained by the contractor until further notice from SafeFood in case of issues arising after the completion of the research.

(g) Data Processing Agreement

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The successful applicant must sign a data processing agreement that will govern the processing of personal data as part of this project. In addition to this Safefood will require details of data protection and security measures in place.

(h) Quality assurance

- Ethical approval at an appropriate time will be an essential component where data collection from participants is involved.
- The contractor will use validated methods where applicable and will apply best practice quality controls to approaches.
- To ensure transparency and reproducibility, all data sources used in the research must be specified, and all data used must be explicitly specified and justified
- Safefood may visit the contractors during the course of the research to assess how the work is being carried out.

5. *Proposed Activities/Deliverables*

- Submission on a 6-monthly basis of an interim report on progress
- Analysis of the final dataset, collation of the results and drafting of a final report to be submitted to Safefood at the end of the 18-month study period.

6. *Evaluation of Tenders*


Tender bids will be evaluated according to the quality of proposals and applicants using the following criteria:

Quality of the proposal:

- ✓ Anticipated deliverables
- ✓ Research method, facilities
- ✓ Value for money including added value and innovation in the research approach
- ✓ Potential for application
- ✓ Work plan, including the overall timeframe.

Quality of Applicants:

- ✓ Experience in subject areas;

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✓ Quality Assurance and Quality Control measures in place.

Please note that the successful applicant must sign a data processing agreement that will govern the processing of personal data as part of this project.

7. Duration of Project

Estimated duration of the project: Total of 18 months. A detailed timescale of research should be submitted by the applicant.

8. Tender Application Forms and Guidelines


The Tender Application Form and associated Guidelines can be downloaded from <https://www.safefood.net/research>. They can also be obtained by emailing research@safefood.net, quoting the project reference number **03-2025**. Alternatively, please contact:

Ms. Gillian Fox
Research Coordinator
SafeFood
7 Eastgate Avenue
Little Island, Co. Cork
Tel: +353212304100

The closing date for receipt of applications by safeFood is no later than **4pm Friday 20th June 2025**.

9. References

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(11) Baker P, Brookes G, Atanasova D and Flint SW (2020) Changing frames of obesity in the UK press 2008–2017. Social Science & Medicine. Volume 264.

(12) Foresight. *Tackling obesities: future choices—project report*. The Stationery Office, London, 2007. http://www.foresight.gov.uk/Obesity/obesity_final/Index.html

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