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## Is being obese a crime? An examination of hiring and workplace discrimination

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**Abstract:** The purpose of the paper is to examine the discrimination and biasness that obese people face during and after hiring in the workplace setting. Based on literature, a conceptual framework has been developed that analyses the impact of obesity, explicit biasness, and implicit biasness on hiring discrimination and workplace discrimination. Data was collected using a self-administered questionnaire on a sample of 95 respondents from the banking sector. A convenient sampling technique was employed and the analysis was done by using structured equation modelling. The results indicated that people who are overweight or obese are less accepted and discriminated against during hiring, and even if they are hired, the views they receive are that they are lazy, lack self-discipline, and incompetent. The stereotypes and negative attitudes towards overweight people have been found at both explicit and implicit levels. The findings of the study have several implications for policymakers in the banking sector, who need to revise recruitment policies, provide equal employment opportunities, and promote a healthy environment in the banks by educating their employees to reduce stereotypes.

**Keywords:** obesity; workplace discrimination; hiring discrimination; explicit biasness; implicit biasness; banking.

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**Biographical notes:** Ali Junaid Khan has diversified professional, teaching, and research experience in the field of human resource management. He has expertise in conducting applied research to solve organisational issues and provide real solutions. Currently, he is working on various projects in the area of organisational and administrative sciences and serving as a reviewer of high impact factor journals.

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## 1 Introduction

Since 1975, the global obesity rate has increased by three times (World Health Organization, 2018). Not only are high-income countries affected, but low-and middle-income countries are as well (World Health Organization, 2018). "Abnormal or excessive fat accumulation that may damage health" is the definition of both overweight and obesity (World Health Organization, 2018). The body mass index (BMI), which is determined using an individual's height and weight, is used as a measure of obesity. Recent data suggests that 39% of adults (18 and older) are overweight, and 13% are obese (World Health Organization, 2018).

Obesity is currently regarded as a worldwide pandemic in the true sense, since it affects all age groups, residents, and countries of every socioeconomic status. In the same way, obesity is a major problem for firms because of injury claims, healthcare expenditures, and worker absenteeism. This can lead to overweight workers being treated unfairly. In spite of anti-discrimination regulations for obese people, obese people are stereotyped and commonly discriminated against in the workplace. Because of greater absenteeism rates, more medical claims, and poorer production rates, obese employees tend to cost businesses more. In the workplace, obesity is a serious problem that needs to be addressed.

First, depending on how it is structured, work might be an obesity risk factor in and of itself. For instance, working nights and weekends increases your risk of being overweight

or obese (Liu et al., 2019). Overweight and obesity have been linked to absenteeism and presenteeism, and it has been demonstrated to reduce productivity (Bullen and Feenie, 2015). Third, the stigma associated with obesity has indirect costs. Flint et al. (2016), for example, found that discrimination against obese employees at the point of selection may result in the organisation's talent pool shrinking and individuals with obesity losing employment opportunities. Due to the fact that people spend roughly two-thirds of their total daily hours at work, an intervention in the workplace is logical (Frase and Gornick, 2013). Employees who are overweight have additional challenges at work because of the stigma attached to them due to their weight.

Unfortunately, the importance of combating obesity stigma is currently being undervalued and overlooked. Current approaches focus on the biological aspects of obesity, with a strong emphasis on changing personal health behaviours. Obesity is a multifactorial disease, with many factors contributing to its development. Psychosocial factors are important, but they are understudied. Obesity, stereotypes, weight bias, and anti-fat attitudes are important psychological factors in the workplace that need to be considered by organisations (Puhl et al., 2017).

Besides that, there have been suggestions for interventions to address the weight stigma, but few interventions have been carried out in the workplace (Puhl et al., 2009). Most research in the workplace has focused on the healthcare industry, examining the impact of an intervention made by healthcare providers in the treatment of obese patients (Godfree, 2020). Current research has practical consequences for initiatives aimed at decreasing the stigma associated with overweight or obese people. Obesity stigma is evident in the workplace, but how it manifests and what impact it has on employees and the organisation are less clear.

This paper will contribute to the literature by identifying whether obese individuals have experienced discrimination and prejudices in organisational settings, in particular regarding discrimination in the key areas of recruitment, and general stereotypes in the workplace environment.

## **2 Theoretical framework and hypothesis development**

### *2.1 Obesity stigma*

Obesity stigma, or weight stigma, is a less-discussed aspect of obesity. Individuals who are overweight or obese are subjected to stereotypes, rejection, or discrimination because of their weight, according to a definition of obesity or weight stigma (Puhl et al., 2008). Furthermore, Epel et al. (2014) defined it as "Social devaluation and rejection experienced by peoples who do not conform to prevalent cultural ideals of bodyweight and physical appearance."

An individual's weight stigma can also be internalised, causing them to blame themselves for the societal devaluation and stigmatisation they face (Puhl et al., 2017). As a result of diet culture, there is a stigma associated with obesity. Diet culture is a belief system that sets a high value on thinness, which is seen as a sign of health and morality (Lane et al., 2020).

Weight stigma has been proposed as a technique to encourage overweight and obese individuals to lose weight, but research has consistently shown that it has a negative influence on weight loss. According to a recent comprehensive study, weight stigma has

been linked to a variety of detrimental psychological and physical health effects (Wu and Berry, 2018). Weight prejudice is typically explained using an attribution theory. For example, according to the attribution theory, people search for causes to explain their actions, which can be internal or external. Because of the stigma attached to being obese, the cause of obesity is assigned to something that the individual can control. When it comes to obesity, there are many clichés, such as a lack of willpower and self-discipline (Puhl et al., 2009). In 2018, a survey was conducted under the name ‘British social attitudes towards obesity’. It was found in a survey that 28% of respondents agreed that most overweight individuals are lazy and 53% agreed that most overweight individuals could lose weight if they tried (Conolly and Davies, 2018).

## *2.2 Theoretical framework*

There are a variety of explanations for why people feel stigmatised because of their weight. Inside this area, we have theories such as social identity theory (Sahabuddin et al., 2021; Tajfel et al., 1979). Social identity theory says that people tend to share their self-identify into distinct groups like the overweight group. People who are overweight face social identity challenges due to negative stereotypes about obesity. Being overweight makes people fear that they will be devalued, discriminated against, or rejected in some way. Other scientists believe in the theories of weight-centredness, health-centredness, and health at every size, among other things (Nutter et al., 2016). The attribution theory is a popular approach to figuring out why people have biases towards overweight people.

As per attribution theory, people look for explanations for their actions in external or internal factors (situational), and fatness is connected to internal causes that a person can influence, and that this is part of a broader philosophical concept linked to individualism and self-determination, which are particularly expressed or valued in specific cultures (Heider, 2013). Therefore, individuals are believed to be getting what they deserve and are blamed for their weight. This stigmatisation can occur as a result of the belief that obesity is caused by individuals. It has been found in general that when the perceived controllability of a stigmatised disease is strong, stereotyping and negative attitudes are more likely to be present (Black et al., 2014). This assumption can be used to explain why negative attributes (e.g., obesity) connected with control are likely to result in weight stigma, such as low self-discipline or laziness, for example, which are both signs of inadequate personal control.

## *2.3 Obesity and hiring discrimination*

Bullen and Feenie (2015) highlighted the urgent need to battle obesity, stressing the disease’s widespread impact on physical health and, crucially, jobs. Obese people are less likely to have jobs than those who have a healthy weight. Black et al. (2016) also found that being overweight can lead to unemployment. Many studies have shown that being overweight or obese has negative effects on recruiting. Morris (2007), for example, stated that prejudice in obesity recruitment can occur as a result of traditional employer assumptions (e.g., either because obese people are perceived to be inefficient and incompetent, or because they are more expensive due to increased absence of illness, increased health costs, or just because an employer dislikes obese people). There is a lack

of information about the causes of obesity, and some employers still see obesity as something that cannot be controlled by people, leading to negative attitudes toward their actions (Lane et al., 2020).

Gosling et al. (2008) presented evidence that weight-based bias can occur even before a recruitment interview begins. People with an average weight were viewed as significantly more attractive. On the other hand, those who were identified as overweight were assessed more negatively and were considered to have more undesirable qualities. According to the researchers, participants in their sample were more likely to recruit applicants with a BMI of 19.26 and less likely to recruit applicants on either side of this peak. Obese people, on the other hand, were judged less favourably than individuals who were considered normal weight or underweight. This prompted the researchers to believe that those who were obese faced the most stigma. Because obese women had to fill out more job applications and participate in more training assignments than their male counterparts (Caliendo and Lee, 2013).

H1 There is a positive relationship between obesity and workplace discrimination.

#### *2.4 Obesity and workplace discrimination*

Discrimination against obesity happens at all levels of the employment relationship, starting at the recruiting level and going through job duties, performance evaluations, salary and incentives. Meta-analyses have shown that, although present at all points in the job cycle, the effect of the obesity stigma may be much less for obese individuals once they have a track record with an organisation (Rudolph, 2011). While the obesity stigma is said to have less effect on the pay level and even less on the level of promotion, it is strongest at the hiring point (Tucker et al., 2014).

Obesity has become a major challenge for organisations. First, depending on how it is structured, work might be an obesity risk factor within itself. For instance, working nights and weekends increases your risk of being overweight or obese (Liu et al., 2019). People who are overweight or obese have been demonstrated to be less productive, and there is a connection between obesity and absenteeism or presenteeism at work (Bullen and Feenie, 2015). Third, the stigma associated with obesity has indirect costs. Flint et al. (2016), for example, found that discrimination against obese employees at the point of selection may result in the organisation's talent pool shrinking and individuals with obesity losing employment opportunities. An intervention in the workplace makes sense because people spend almost two-thirds of their waking hours at work (Frase and Gornick, 2013). For these reasons, employers must consider both the role of obesity as well as negative perceptions of overweight employees in the workplace.

In addition, other studies report that in the workplace, overweight and obese people complain more about discrimination than people of normal weight, while, in some cases, earning less money despite having higher education and experience. Both laboratory and field considerations show that obese people are more reluctant to be recruited than thin people, even with indistinguishable capabilities (Roehling et al., 2008).

H2 There is a positive relationship between obesity and hiring discrimination.

## 2.5 *Implicit biasness, hiring discrimination and workplace discrimination*

Jordan et al. (2015) explain that in occupations and occupational success, obesity is a general barrier to employment. Regarding work-related characteristics, obese individuals have a higher chance of encountering stereotypes, and they will face unequal treatment inside the operational place if they are hired. Discrimination against weight is, by all accounts, greater than other individual attributes that are considered to be beyond one's control. According to previous studies, obese people do not try as hard (orderly, dependable, and goal-oriented). They are less trained, which leads to less organisational commitment (Junaid et al., 2021; Khan and Iqbal, 2020a, 2020b) and less likely to be acceptable to others and less likely to get along with others (Javeria, 2013). Those individuals are less agreeable (tendency to be good natured) and have less tendency to be responsible. They are more likely to have personal problems and less emotionally stable (optimistic, tendency to calm) as well as less extraverted (activeness, assertiveness, social ability, being unbeaten) than normal-weight people (Roehling et al., 2008). The staff showed a strong desire to work with people of normal weight and less desire to work with overweight people. The evidence shows that chubby people are considered to have low leadership potential, and compared with ordinary-weight partners, they are expected to be less successful (Flint et al., 2016).

H3 Implicit biasness towards obesity have a positive relationship with workplace discrimination.

Implicit biases can be seen. In terms of the recruitment process, discrimination can be difficult to document, but research shows that there are biases against obese people during the hiring process. One of the very first experimental studies on the existence of this occurrence was conducted by Godfree (2020). To demonstrate the biasness Godfree (2020) directed a simple experiment where human resource recruiters watched simulated interview videos for a job. In the interview, the fake applicant for the vacant position had to give different types of tests to measure personal capabilities. All things being kept constant, the experimental manipulation varied only in the weight of the candidate. The conclusion from this study was that the overweight individuals recommendation was low and that the evaluation made of the obese applicant was considerably more negative as compared to the normal-weight applicant for the vacant position.

H4 Implicit biasness towards obesity have a positive relationship with hiring discrimination.

## 2.6 *Explicit biasness, hiring discrimination and workplace discrimination*

There are many cases and examples of overweight and obese workers being discriminated against at work. One of the infamous examples was in 2007, when Annette McConnell was fired from her job because of her weight, despite her success, since, as her boss put it, "people don't like buying from fat people" (Flint and Snook, 2014).

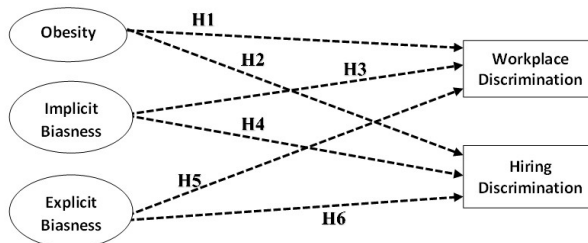
Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) is a prime example of explicit bias. Weight loss or job loss was the message in a memo sent by PIA in January 2019 to all of its cabin crew, a clear indication of the airline's prejudice against obesity. They would be grounded until they lost the excess weight if the cabin crew was obese. It did not specify the ideal weight for cabin crew, but it did state that they should be 'slim, smart, and fit'

and that they should receive a recommended weight chart when hired by the airline (<http://www.foxnews.com>).

Obese human beings are much less efficient at work because of extra sick days and fewer labour hours, and they earn approximately 10% less than non-obese human beings (OECD, 2017). Addressing the weight problems and terrible outcomes related to the labour market could help break the venomous circle of social inequalities and physical conditions (Mooteri et al., 2004). According to Puhl and King (2013), multiple negative outcomes are associated with obesity, including depression, low self-esteem, maladaptive eating habits, body disorders, low academic performance, anxiety, low physical activity, suicide theory, and medical attention.

- H5 Explicit biasness towards obesity have a positive relationship with workplace discrimination.
- H6 Explicit biasness towards obesity have a positive relationship with hiring discrimination.

**Figure 1** Theoretical framework



### 3 Research methodology

The relationship between belief and behaviour appears to be complex; many studies found that prejudiced beliefs and/or attitudes did not lead to discriminatory behaviour (Allan et al., 2016; Polinko and Popovich, 2001). Allan et al. (2016) observed that although millennials exhibited prejudice in their attitudes and stereotypes, these did not have a significant impact on their recruiting decisions in their sample population. During their research, Polinko and Popovich (2001) found that attitudes and behaviours were inconsistent. Inconsistencies between attitudes and behaviours, which have been studied for decades. To better comprehend this dissonance, it is necessary to investigate the interaction between the different aspects of stigma. Research on obesity bias has given inconsistent results. Therefore, additional research is needed to determine the most effective techniques for weight bias reduction (Puhl et al., 2009).

A descriptive research design was used to discuss and clearly define the relationship between the different variables and factors of the study. The study used a quantitative approach and relied on primary data sources. The population of study consists of obese employees working in the banking sector of South Punjab. As the population is unknown, a non-probability convenience sampling technique was used. According to Hoffman et al. (2005), each item should be represented using 5 samples. Therefore, keeping in view the



above parameters, there are 19 items in the questionnaire, so the sample size is 95 for this study.

### 3.1 Research instrument and data collection procedure

Data collection is the most significant portion of the entire methodology because the data collected during the survey directly affects the overall reliability and validity of the research study. This is why the data collection techniques should be affiliated with and related to the objectives of the study. The data was collected on a self-administrated questionnaire by visiting banks. A brief introduction to the study was given to participants before filling out the questionnaire to obtain their true opinions. Participants were assured that their opinions would be kept private. No questionnaire was incomplete, therefore, all were included in the analysis.

**Table 1** Scale of study

|                                 |   |
|---------------------------------|---|
| <i>Obesity/overweight</i>       |   |
| 1                               | What would you say about yourself?  |
| 2                               | Does your weight put you at risk for depression?  |
| 3                               | Is it true that you think of yourself as being a bit overweight?  |
| 4                               | In what ways does your weight affect your productivity at work?   |
| <i>Implicit biasness</i>        |   |
| 5                               | People who are overweight or obese tend to be more self-conscious than healthy-weight individuals.                  |
| 6                               | The personalities of fat persons tend to differ from those of non-obese people.                                     |
| 7                               | When people associate with obese people, they often feel uneasy.  |
| <i>Explicit biasness</i>        |   |
| 8                               | There have been cases where I have been jealous when others are doing well.   |
| 9                               | When I gain weight, I feel ashamed of myself.   |
| 10                              | I am sometimes worried about those who ask me for a favour.   |
| 11                              | I sometimes feel frustrated when my progress is not over.   |
| 12                              | I take a positive attitude towards myself.  |
| <i>Hiring discrimination</i>    |   |
| 13                              | Being an employer hiring a fat individual could be a bad idea.  |
| 14                              | Does being overweight affect hiring decisions?  |
| 15                              | Being overweight can weigh down your career prospects.  |
| <i>Workplace discrimination</i> |   |
| 16                              | Obese people in active employment are more likely to be discriminated against than people in non-active employment. |
| 17                              | Obese persons are less likely to find work than people of a healthy weight.   |
| 18                              | Workers who are overweight or obese will have a harder time advancing in their careers than those who are slim.     |
| 19                              | Obese people face more discrimination at workplace than normal weight people  |

The survey has two sections. The first section contains demographic and personal factors, including, height, weight, and gender. The second section contains the variables (dependent and independent) of the study. The scales of the study were adopted from existing literature. The attitudes towards obese persons scale (ATOP) measures stereotypical attitudes about obese people adapted from the study by Allison et al. (1991). The implicit association test (IAT) was adapted from Nosek et al. (2005) and the anti-fat attitudes (AFA) from Lewis et al. (1997). The respondents were requested to indicate their views on the five-point Likert scale format, from strongly agree to strongly disagree. In some questions, multiple choices are given related to weight questions to check whether respondents view themselves as obese from very overweight to very underweight.

### 3.2 Data analysis and results

In the first step of analysing the data, reliability and validity were checked. To check reliability Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability were checked. In the second step, the factor loading and (AVE) were examined for internal consistency and convergent validity. In addition, external consistency was examined by discriminant validity.

**Table 2** Data screening

|      | <i>No.</i> | <i>Missing</i> | <i>Mean</i> | <i>Median</i> | <i>Min</i> | <i>Max</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>Kurtosis</i> | <i>Skewness</i> |
|------|------------|----------------|-------------|---------------|------------|------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------------|
| OB1  | 1          | 0              | 3.194       | 3             | 1          | 7          | 1.442     | -0.255          | 0.066           |
| OB2  | 2          | 0              | 3.19        | 3             | 1          | 7          | 1.745     | -0.47           | 0.456           |
| OB3  | 3          | 0              | 3.469       | 3             | 1          | 7          | 1.838     | -0.616          | 0.372           |
| OB4  | 4          | 0              | 3.417       | 3             | 1          | 7          | 1.831     | -0.546          | 0.465           |
| IT1  | 5          | 0              | 3.455       | 3             | 1          | 7          | 1.656     | -0.195          | 0.367           |
| IT2  | 6          | 0              | 3.393       | 3             | 1          | 7          | 1.75      | -0.546          | 0.27            |
| IT3  | 7          | 0              | 3.408       | 3             | 1          | 7          | 1.759     | -0.711          | 0.163           |
| ET1  | 8          | 0              | 3.616       | 4             | 1          | 7          | 1.847     | -0.665          | 0.285           |
| ET2  | 9          | 0              | 3.659       | 3             | 1          | 7          | 1.834     | -0.645          | 0.36            |
| ET3  | 10         | 0              | 3.602       | 3             | 1          | 7          | 1.926     | -0.674          | 0.433           |
| ET4  | 11         | 0              | 3.502       | 3             | 1          | 7          | 1.846     | -0.577          | 0.436           |
| ET5  | 12         | 0              | 3.555       | 3             | 1          | 7          | 1.835     | -0.556          | 0.402           |
| HD1  | 13         | 0              | 3.559       | 3             | 1          | 7          | 1.86      | -0.67           | 0.349           |
| HD2  | 14         | 0              | 3.488       | 3             | 1          | 7          | 1.767     | -0.345          | 0.495           |
| HD3  | 15         | 0              | 3.469       | 3             | 1          | 7          | 1.873     | -0.785          | 0.258           |
| HD4  | 16         | 0              | 3.403       | 3             | 1          | 7          | 1.78      | -0.436          | 0.392           |
| WPD1 | 17         | 0              | 3.578       | 3             | 1          | 7          | 1.744     | -0.399          | 0.362           |
| WPD2 | 18         | 0              | 2.943       | 3             | 1          | 7          | 1.383     | 0.29            | 0.677           |
| WPD3 | 19         | 0              | 3.014       | 3             | 1          | 7          | 1.34      | 0.98            | 0.926           |
| WPD4 | 20         | 0              | 3.09        | 3             | 1          | 7          | 1.253     | 0.571           | 0.979           |

### 3.3 Data screening

The data was found to be normally distributed because the kurtosis and skewness were both less than 1. Statistically, the Jarque-Bera test confirmed that the variables exhibited continuous and multivariate normal distributions. We also looked for multicollinearity to prevent increasing the loadings' standard error, and no problem was found. As a result, the variance inflation was less than three, with a tolerability of more than 0. For self-reported surveys, method bias is a concern that we addressed using both procedural and statistical approaches (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

### 3.4 Factor loadings

It is the correlation coefficient between the variables that determines the factor loading. A factor loading of 0.7 or higher in the SEM approach indicates that the factor is able to extract enough variance from a variable. A linear relationship between hiring discrimination and workplace discrimination, obesity, implicit and explicit biasness, is tested to see if there is a statistically significant relationship. Factor loading values of variables are more than 0.7, which shows that factors such as hiring discrimination, workplace discrimination, being overweight, implicit biasness and explicit biasness are highly correlated. It is shown in the measurement model assessment table of factor loading.

**Table 3** Factor loadings values

|     | <i>Explicit biasness</i> | <i>Hiring discrimination</i> | <i>Implicit biasness</i> | <i>Obesity/overweight</i> | <i>Workplace discrimination</i> |
|-----|--------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------|
| ET1 | 0.891                    |                              |                          |                           |                                 |
| ET2 | 0.904                    |                              |                          |                           |                                 |
| ET3 | 0.929                    |                              |                          |                           |                                 |
| ET4 | 0.921                    |                              |                          |                           |                                 |
| ET5 | 0.877                    |                              |                          |                           |                                 |
| HD1 |                          | 0.906                        |                          |                           |                                 |
| HD2 |                          | 0.909                        |                          |                           |                                 |
| HD3 |                          | 0.912                        |                          |                           |                                 |
| HD4 |                          | 0.894                        |                          |                           |                                 |
| IT1 |                          |                              | 0.938                    |                           |                                 |
| IT2 |                          |                              | 0.941                    |                           |                                 |
| IT3 |                          |                              | 0.925                    |                           |                                 |
| OB1 |                          |                              |                          | 0.896                     |                                 |
| OB2 |                          |                              |                          | 0.908                     |                                 |
| OB3 |                          |                              |                          | 0.913                     |                                 |
| OB4 |                          |                              |                          | 0.891                     |                                 |
| WD1 |                          |                              |                          |                           | 0.788                           |
| WD2 |                          |                              |                          |                           | 0.846                           |
| WD3 |                          |                              |                          |                           | 0.883                           |
| WD4 |                          |                              |                          |                           | 0.861                           |

Table 3 represents the factor loading values of hiring discrimination, workplace discrimination, being overweight, implicit biasness and explicit biasness.

### 3.5 Scale reliability

The Cronbach's alpha value on this scale is 0.9, which is excellent. The Cronbach's alpha value shows that all five items on the scale are reliable. Composite reliability measures the internal consistency of items, and 0.7 is the minimum standard of acceptance. Table 4 highlights the AVE values which are used as a measure for checking validity. Average variance extracted (AVE) values of variables shown in Table 4 are above the conventional threshold of 0.5, seen to be higher than the minimum threshold which is acceptable.

**Table 4** Cronbach alpha, composite reliability and AVE

|                          | <i>Cronbach's alpha</i> | <i>rho_A</i> | <i>Composite reliability</i> | <i>Average variance extracted</i> |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|--------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Explicit biasness        | 0.944                   | 0.945        | 0.957                        | 0.818                             |
| Hiring discrimination    | 0.868                   | 0.882        | 0.909                        | 0.714                             |
| Implicit biasness        | 0.928                   | 0.928        | 0.954                        | 0.874                             |
| Obesity/overweight       | 0.923                   | 0.924        | 0.946                        | 0.813                             |
| Workplace discrimination | 0.926                   | 0.927        | 0.948                        | 0.819                             |

Table 4 shows the square root of the AVE. According to Fornell-Larcker, the upper value should be greater than the lower values that are shown in Table 5. In the first column, the value of explicit biasness (0.904) is higher as compared with other variables: hiring discrimination, implicit biasness, obesity/overweight and workplace discrimination (0.765, 0.879, 0.82 and 0.837).

**Table 5** Discriminant validity using Fornell-Larcke's measures

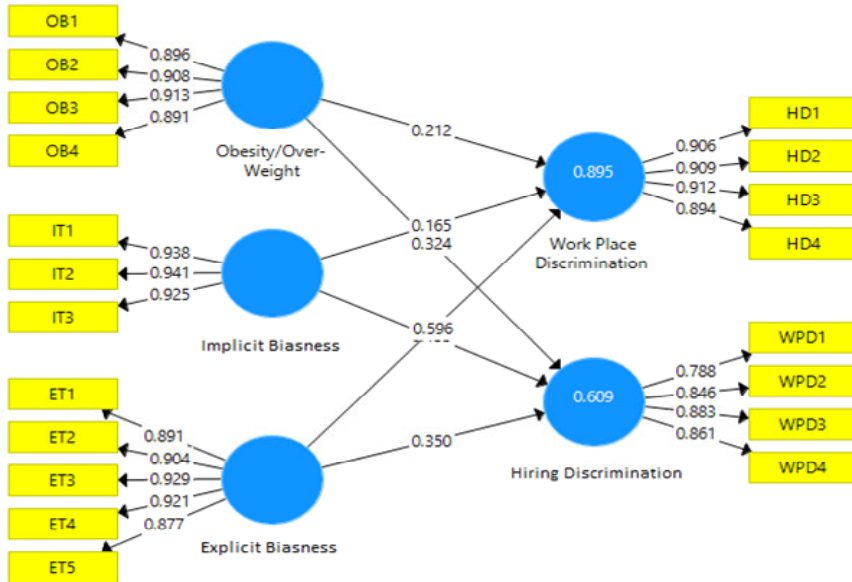
|                          | <i>Explicit biasness</i> | <i>Hiring discrimination</i> | <i>Implicit biasness</i> | <i>Obesity/overweight</i> | <i>Workplace discrimination</i> |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Explicit biasness        | 0.904                    |                              |                          |                           |                                 |
| Hiring discrimination    | 0.765                    | 0.845                        |                          |                           |                                 |
| Implicit biasness        | 0.879                    | 0.718                        | 0.935                    |                           |                                 |
| Obesity/overweight       | 0.82                     | 0.76                         | 0.857                    | 0.902                     |                                 |
| Workplace discrimination | 0.837                    | 0.759                        | 0.871                    | 0.901                     | 0.903                           |

The value of hiring discrimination (0.845) is higher as compared with other variables, implicit biasness, obesity/overweight and workplace discrimination (0.718, 0.76 and 0.759). The value of implicit biasness (0.935) is higher in comparison with other variables. Obesity/overweight and workplace discrimination (0.857 and 0.871). The value of obesity/overweight (0.902) is higher in comparison with other variables, workplace discrimination (0.901).

Figure 2 shows that the  $R^2$  value for workplace discrimination is 0.895. It demonstrates that independent variables (explicit biasness, implicit biasness and

obesity/overweight) are expected to explain 89.5% of the variance in workplace discrimination. This significant value shows that the model has a significant match with the variables. Its appearance is not by chance.

**Figure 2** R-square values (see online version for colours)



Moreover, Figure 2 shows that the R<sup>2</sup> value for hiring discrimination is 0.609. It demonstrates that independent variables (explicit biasness, implicit biasness and obesity/overweight) are expected to explain 60.9% of the variance in hiring discrimination.

**Table 6** Hypothesis results

|  | Beta  | Mean  | SD    | T statistics | P values |
|--|-------|-------|-------|--------------|----------|
| Explicit biasness -> hiring discrimination     | 0.35  | 0.347 | 0.138 | 2.538        | 0.011    |
| Explicit biasness -> workplace discrimination  | 0.596 | 0.596 | 0.066 | 8.982        | 0        |
| Implicit biasness -> hiring discrimination     | 0.133 | 0.132 | 0.03  | 4.433        | 0        |
| Implicit biasness -> workplace discrimination  | 0.165 | 0.166 | 0.053 | 3.108        | 0.002    |
| Obesity/overweight -> hiring discrimination    | 0.324 | 0.33  | 0.119 | 2.731        | 0.007    |
| Obesity/overweight -> workplace discrimination | 0.212 | 0.213 | 0.061 | 3.503        | 0.001    |

### 3.6 Hypothesis testing

Beta values are a measure of how strongly each predictor variable influences the criterion (dependent) variable. The predictor variables (explicit biasness, implicit biasness and

obesity/overweight) are positively related to the criterion variables (workplace discrimination and hiring discrimination).

PLS bootstrapping was used to test the hypothesis constructed by previous literature. The threshold value for accepting or rejecting a hypothesis is 1.96. Table 6 shows the result of t-statistics. It is clear that all the variables have a value greater than 1.96. This means the hypothesis is accepted.

The results show that the independent variables (explicit thought, overweight, implicit thought) have a significant impact on the dependent variables (hiring discrimination and workplace discrimination).

## **4 Discussion and conclusions**

It was investigated in the current study whether obese people face discrimination at work and when applying for jobs. Obesity discrimination has been documented in the past as well (Flint et al., 2016; Flint and Snook, 2014). The results show that discrimination is present in the workplace and in hiring due to implicit and explicit biasness of employers because obese people are perceived as lazy, less emotionally stable, shy, less potential, having less self-control and less extraverted (activeness, assertiveness, social ability, being unbeatable) and these results are consistent with previous studies (Johnson and Schminke, 2020; Summers et al., 2018). Findings of the study revealed that obese people are automatically associated with negative perceptions and attributes (bad, lazy, dependent). Most people explicitly rate fat people as lazier and less motivated than normal-weight people in workplace settings (Johnson and Schminke, 2020).

The concept of workplace discrimination exists in the banking sector because there is a need for mental work as well as physical activities to be performed in banks. The banking sector is actually a service sector in which preference is given to people who are good-looking and have the skills to complete tasks easily and quickly (Nadeem et al., 2018). Reducing stigma by rejecting myths and creating a positive, accepting work environment is the best current solution to curb weight discrimination in the workplace (Ramos Salas et al., 2017).

Overall, the study adds to the growing evidence of obesity discrimination in the workplace and in society. Due to the increasing prevalence of obesity and the consequent increase in the number of overweight and obese candidates, the current study findings should be taken into account at the policy level to ensure that all candidates, regardless of their weight status, have equal opportunities for employment. Therefore, current banking and labour laws in Pakistan need to be modified to address obesity discrimination.

### *4.1 Implications for organisations and society*

There are numerous implications for organisations in light of these findings. As a starting point, companies should think about how they might lessen the weight stigma in their workplace. Organisations should, for example, make changes to their recruitment procedures to ensure that all employees have an equal opportunity (Godfree, 2020). The general public can also be educated about obesity's heterogeneity and multifaceted nature by organisations, for example. The scientific understanding of obesity and the public narrative about obesity are at odds, particularly when it comes to obesity's underlying causes (Rubino et al., 2020). The obesity stigma, on the other hand, is a complex issue.

Obesity education and prevention should be part of health promotion efforts, and organisations should think about including these concerns in their efforts. Many businesses that already help their employees lose weight are looking into whether adding support for weight stigma to their programs would be of interest to their employees. As an illustration of this type of system, consider the sharing of weight stigma experiences and the discussion of healthy remedies (Puhl et al., 2017).

Everyone should be treated equally in society, regardless of size. Health at every size is an example of a society that is moving in the direction of inclusivity, but there is still a strong focus on aesthetics and a very well defined ideal body image that individuals are encouraged to acquire. Increasing the number of diverse images in the media can help to reduce the obesity biasness (Godfree, 2020). Research shows that social determinants of health (such as education, wealth, and social class) are linked to obesity, and they should be better understood in society as a whole (Faeh et al., 2011). Researchers have also found links between desirable body weight and a lack of resources, underlining the socio-cultural ramifications of stigma (Swami et al., 2011).

#### 4.2 Recommendations for future research

This research only discusses whether obese employees are discriminated against in the banking sector. The questionnaire is used to identify workplace discrimination, and the results obtained could be biased because each person has his own ideas on a single scale, and the specific questions cannot measure all subjects completely. Laboratory studies and interviews with fat people from real-life workplaces should be a priority for further research to support the conclusions of earlier researchers. This research provides guidance for future investigation to explore several other hidden factors of discrimination in the banking field, for example, promotion, psychosocial concerns, etc.

A wide range of professions, work environments, and attitudes should be examined. The survey should be done with recruiters and managers who have employment authority and personal responsibility for hiring and firing. The results and causes of weight discrimination are not completely understood and have barely been studied to this point in time. Weight-based discrimination in the workplace and its underlying mechanisms need to be studied further through field research.

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