

## iAmHealthy's Effects on Stigma and Bullying Perpetration

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**Introduction.** Overweight youth experience increased rates of victimization and are more likely to engage in bullying perpetration. Within rural areas, there is minimal research examining the impact of pediatric obesity interventions on bullying and the stigma associated with obesity interventions. This study aims to fill that gap by evaluating if iAmHealthy, a pediatric obesity intervention delivered virtually to youth in rural Kansas, results in any stigma for participants and if iAmHealthy resulted in improvements in perceived stigma and bullying perpetration when compared to a Newsletter Control.

**Methods.** At baseline, post (eight months), and follow-up (20 months), participants completed questionnaires assessing weight stigma (Teasing subscale of “Sizing Me Up”), bullying perpetration (“Schwartz Peer Victimization Scale”), and a question regarding stigma experienced as a result of the intervention. Children (n = 148) from 2nd-4th grade were randomized at the school-level to either iAmHealthy (n = 64) or Newsletter Control (n = 84).

**Results.** Repeated measures ANOVAs revealed no significant interactions between treatment group and time for weight stigma ( $F(2,232) = 0.07, p = 0.931$ ) or bullying perpetration ( $F(2,232) = 0.15, p = 0.863$ ). Few participants in the iAmHealthy cohort (n = 1) and the Newsletter Control (n = 3) reported intervention-related stigma.

**Conclusions.** Participation in iAmHealthy had no significant effect on weight stigma, bullying perpetration, and intervention-related stigma. Of note, baseline levels of bullying perpetration and stigma were low in the study population. Future research should explore the impact of pediatric obesity interventions on youth who initially report higher levels of stigma and bullying perpetration.