Obesity Prevention Interventions in US Public Schools: Are Schools Using Programs That Promote Weight Stigma?

School-based obesity prevention programmes are being identified as a key public health strategy to counter the childhood obesity epidemic. However, these programmes are also cautiously regarded as they have the potential to trigger unhealthy weight-control behaviours or enhance weight stigma. The main aim of this pilot study was to evaluate how frequently schools use evidence-based obesity prevention programmes. Additionally, it aimed to assess the frequency at which schools implement programmes that may unintentionally exacerbate weight stigma. To do so, the authors explored school administrators’ perceptions of key facilitators and barriers to adopt wellness programmes.

The study unfortunately highlighted that only around 3% of schools implemented school-based obesity prevention and nutrition or physical activity promotion programmes. Among the few schools that are developing programmes, most are developing their own programmes, despite some well-designed ones readily available to them. This is concerning both from a use of resource perspective as well as increasing the risk of implementing ineffective and potentially harmful programmes.