

Access to Care for Severe Childhood Obesity Challenges for Patients and Families

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April 30, 2019

Disclosures

- **Professional fees**
 - Novo Nordisk
 - Nutrisystem
- **Personal biases that favor:**
 - Evidence-based interventions, both prevention and treatment
 - Respect for people living with obesity
 - Critical thinking about all evidence

Presentation Objectives

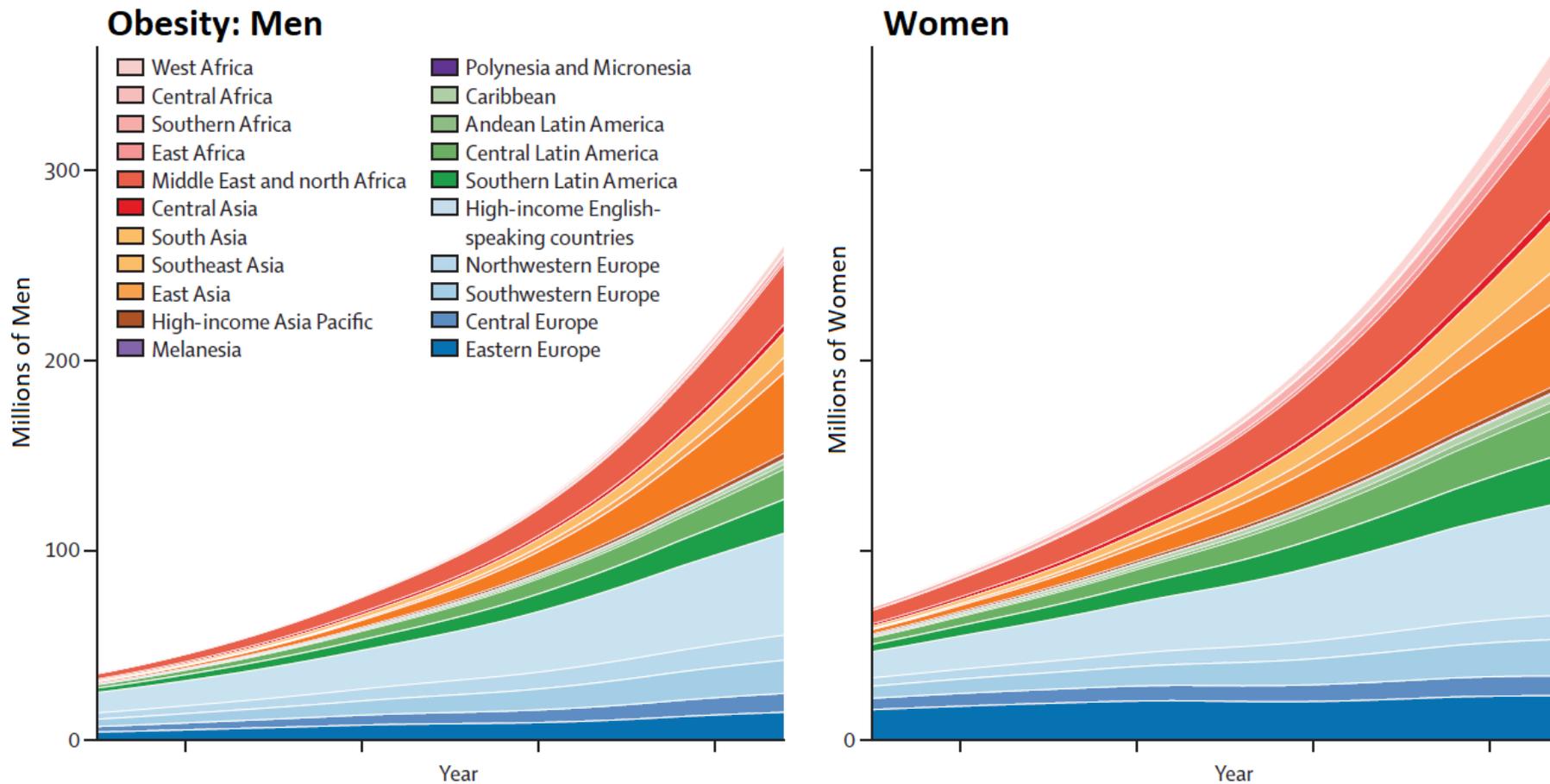
- Describe the gap between:
 - Medical needs of youth with severe obesity
 - Accessible care
- Discuss reasons and potential strategies for overcoming the problem



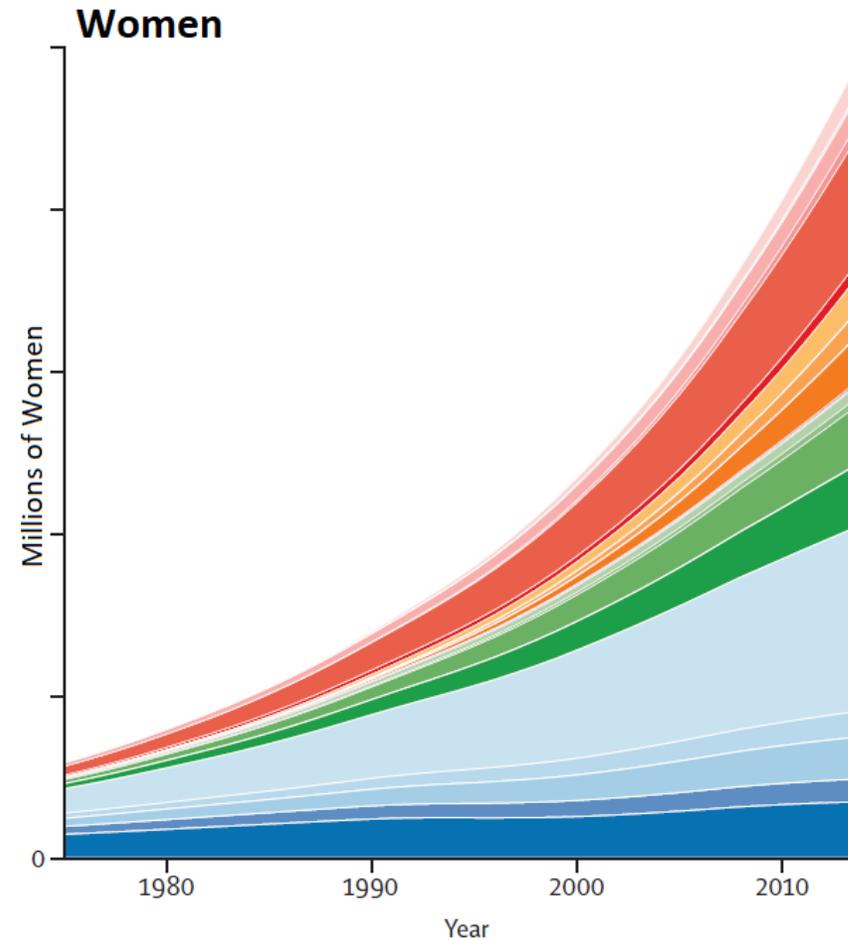
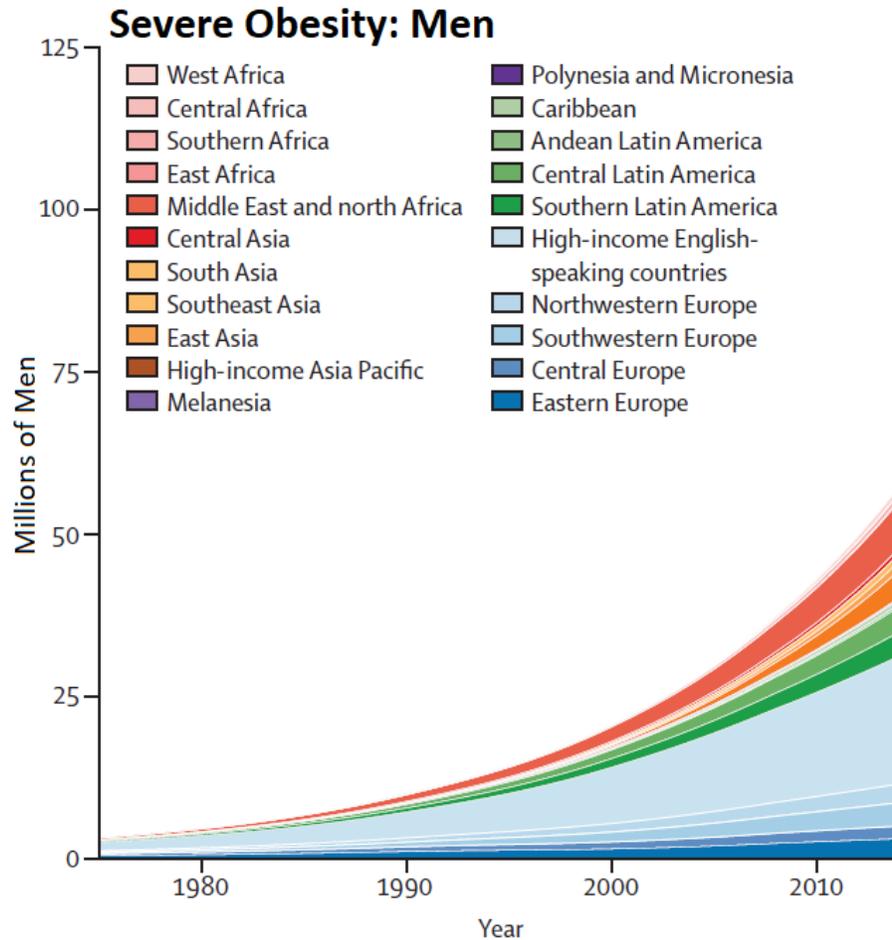
Deseree, photograph © Garen Dibartolomeo for ConscienHealth

Obesity Is Growing

More Common Everywhere Around the World



Severe Obesity Growing Fastest



Prevalence of Childhood Obesity Is Growing Steadily



Growth in Severe Childhood Obesity Is Most Significant

“Building on our previous work, we have been able to document the steadily rising levels of severe obesity, modeled on adult criteria of class I, II, and III obesity, with the rise of children with severe obesity having been the most significant.”

- Skinner et al, Pediatrics, 2018



Eugene, photograph © Garen Dibartolomeo

But Bias Drives Policy Decisions That Affect Clinical Care



Nathalie, photograph © Garen Dibartolomeo

“Prevention obviously has to be the primary strategy for dealing with obesity, because there’s just too much obesity to treat.”

Only 37 Clinics for 5 Million Children with Severe Obesity



The Situation is No Better Here in the U.K.



Prof Paul Gately

@profpaulgately

Replying to [@Mpmok](#) [@ConscienHealth](#) and 6 others

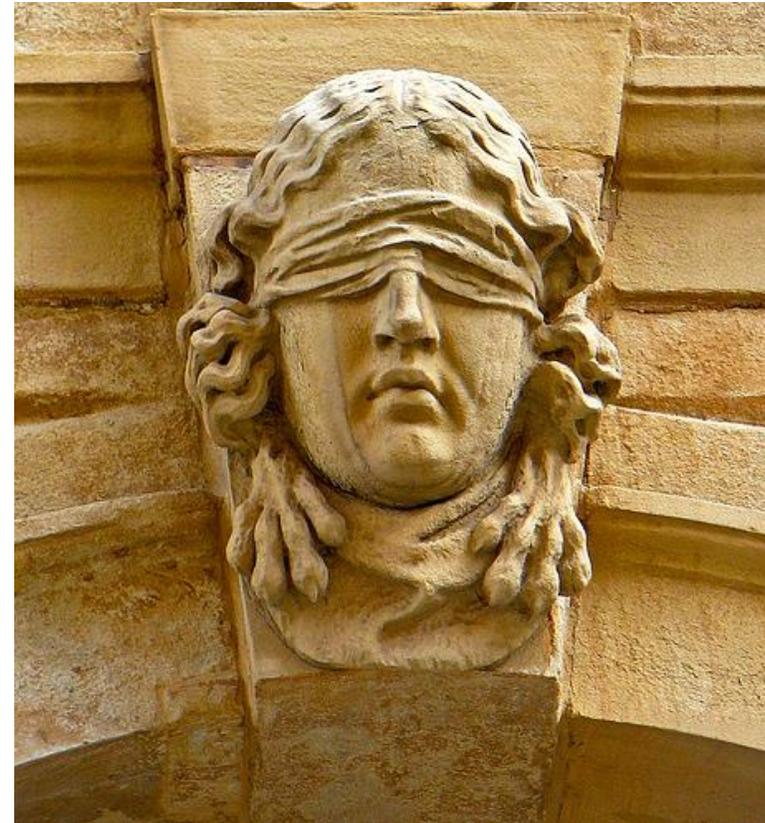
There is no national provision for the estimated 450k children with severe obesity in the UK. 10 yr plan suggests support for 1000, but it's clearly not a uk priority despite the many promises. We tried to maintain services, but with no funding it's not possible.

4:53 PM - 25 Apr 2019

Bias Comes from Selective Blindness to Facts

Bias is an inclination or outlook to present or hold a **partial perspective**, often accompanied by a **refusal to consider** the possible merits of **alternative points of view**. Biases are learned implicitly within cultural contexts. People may develop biases toward or **against** an **individual**, an ethnic **group**, a nation, a religion, a social class, a political party, theoretical **paradigms** and **ideologies** within academic domains, or a species.

– Adapted from
Psychology: Contemporary Perspectives
Paul Okami



Two Kinds of Bias

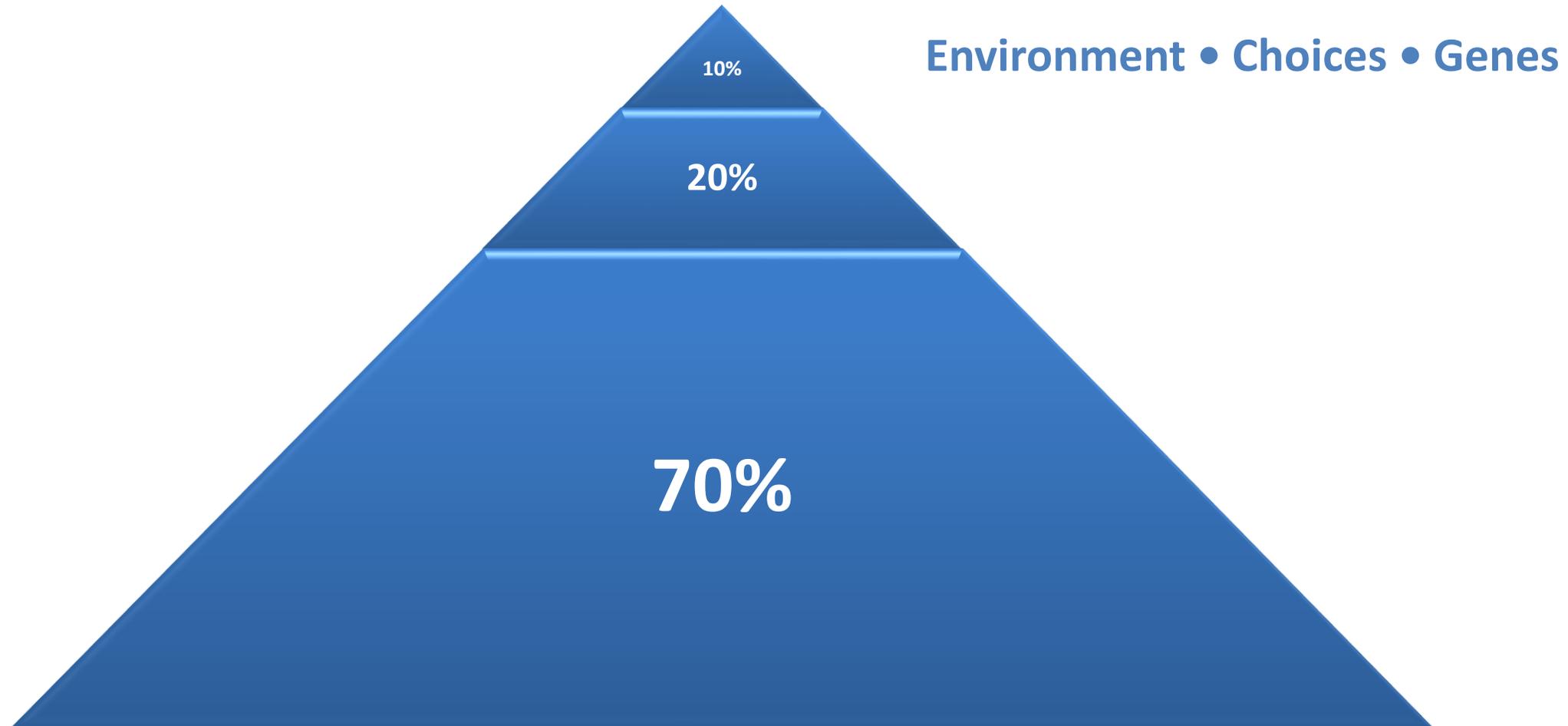
Corrupt Our Response to Obesity

- **Intellectual bias**
favoring personal convictions
- **Weight bias**
directed at people with obesity



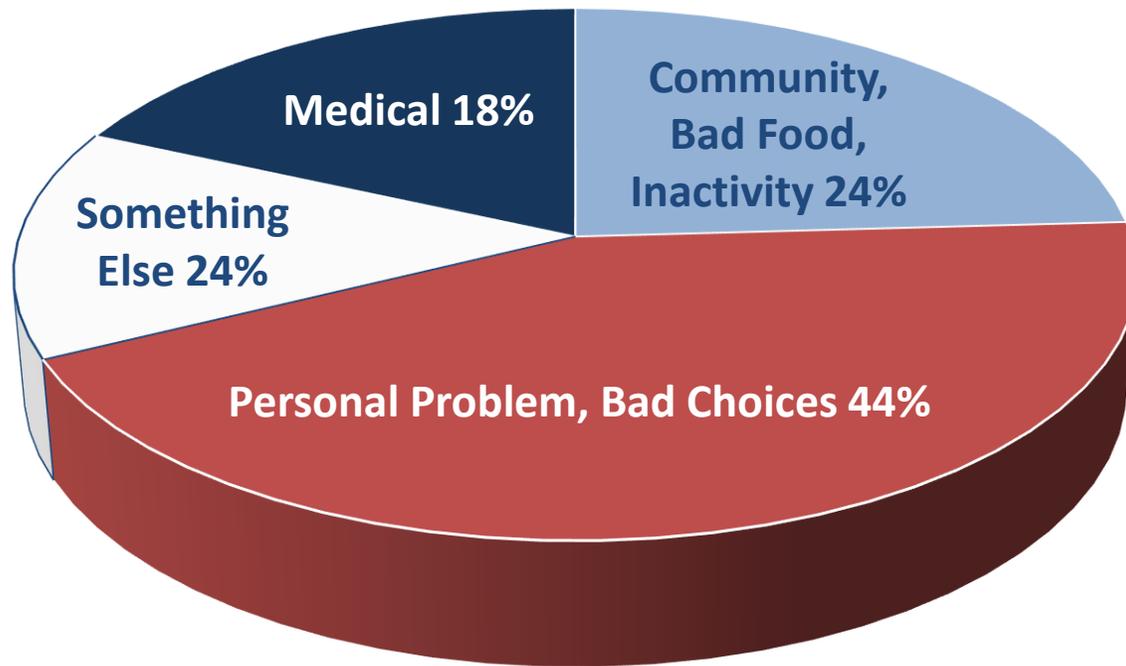
God Judging Adam, Etching by William Blake / WikiArt

People Typically View Obesity as the Result of Poor Choices



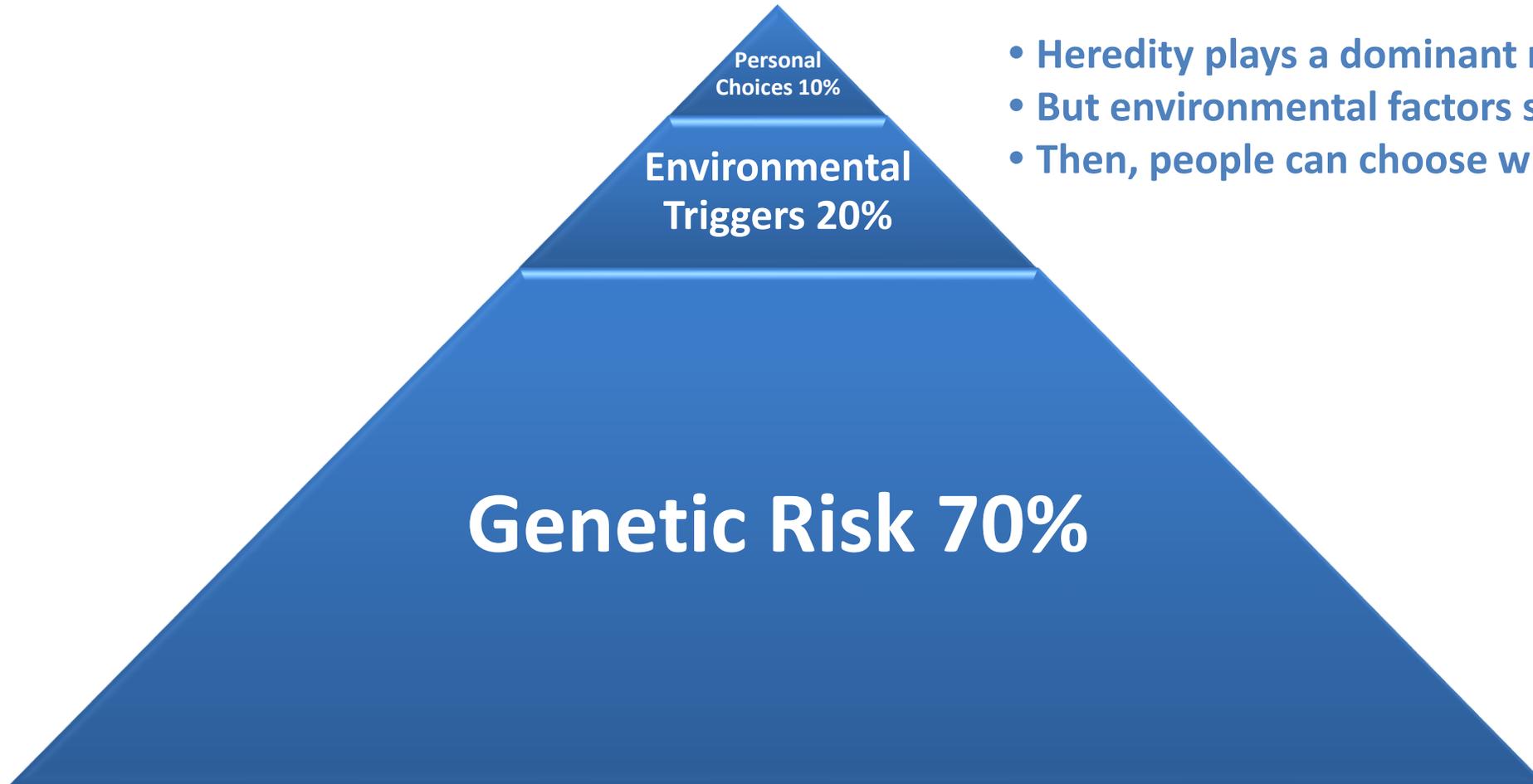
Long Viewed as a Matter of Choice

“Which phrase comes closest to describing the type of problem that you think obesity is?” (Feb 2013)



- **Bad personal choices was the dominant explanation in 2013**
- **Data from ongoing tracking**
- **Respondents asked to pick one**

The Truth Is That Obesity Is a Highly Heritable Chronic Disease



- Heredity plays a dominant role in obesity risk
- But environmental factors serve to activate it
- Then, people can choose what to do about it

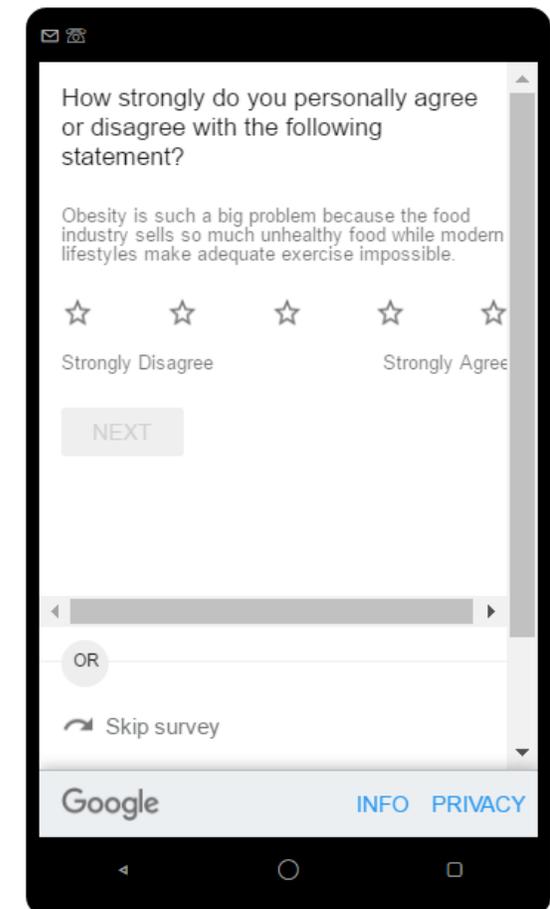
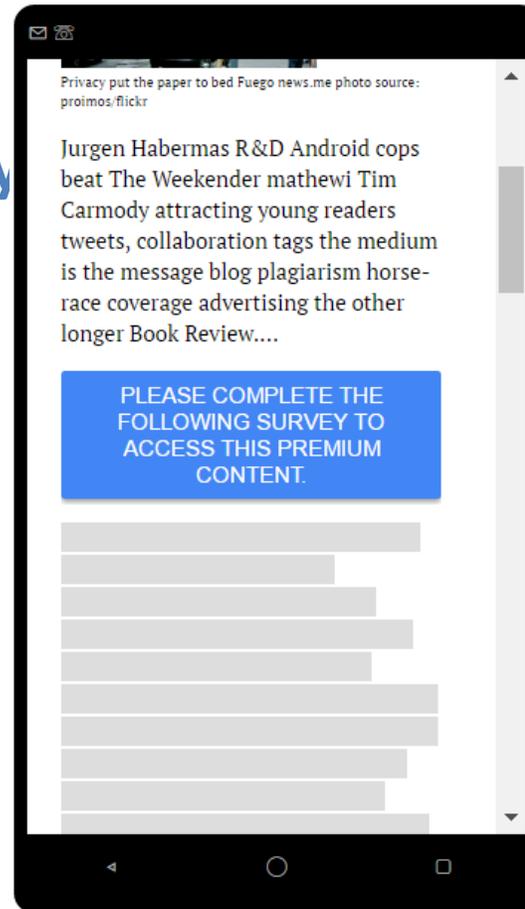
We Used Google Consumer Surveys to Measure Beliefs About Severe Childhood Obesity

Question

- “What do you believe is the primary cause of severe obesity when it occurs in young children?”

Sample

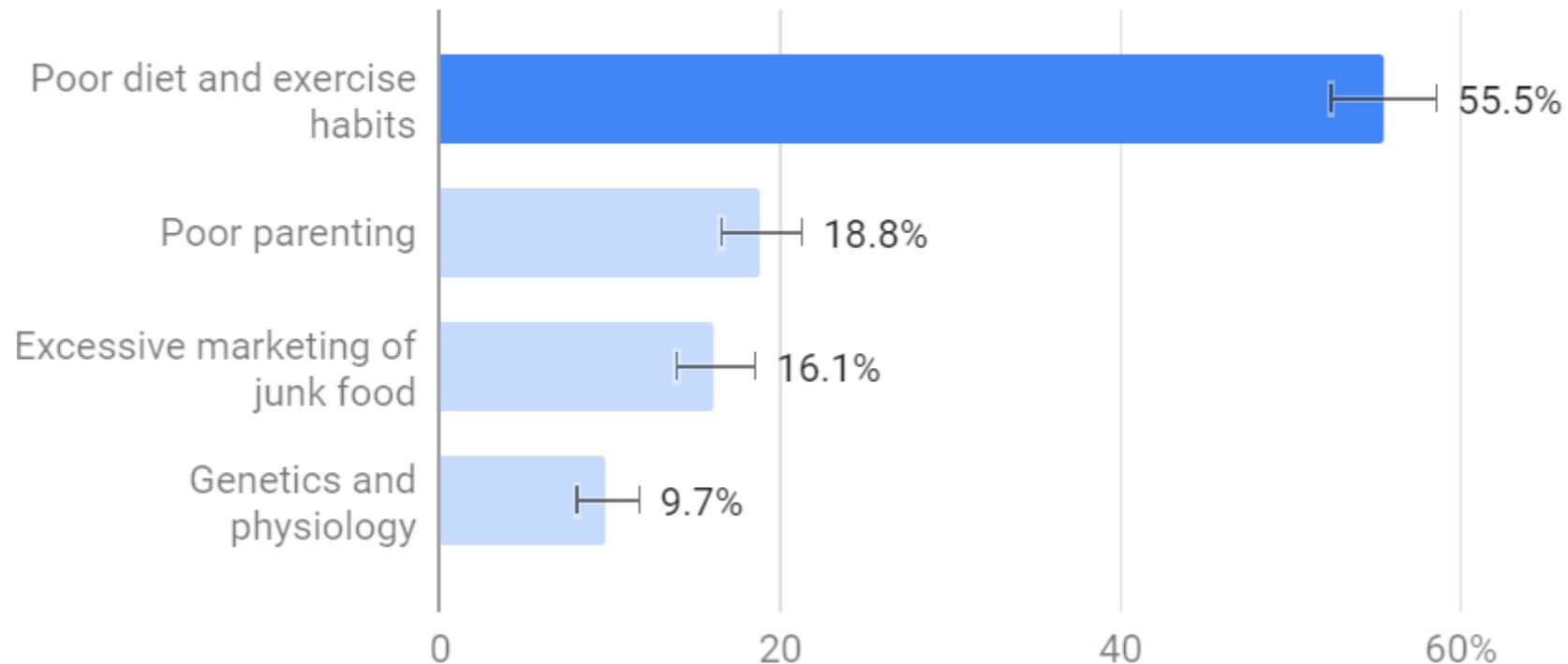
- Total ~4,000 adults
- In the U.S., U.K., France, and Italy
- Fielded in April 2019



Poor Diet and Exercise Habits Seen as the Primary Cause, Especially in the U.K.

What do you believe is the primary cause of severe obesity when it occurs in young children?

722 respondents

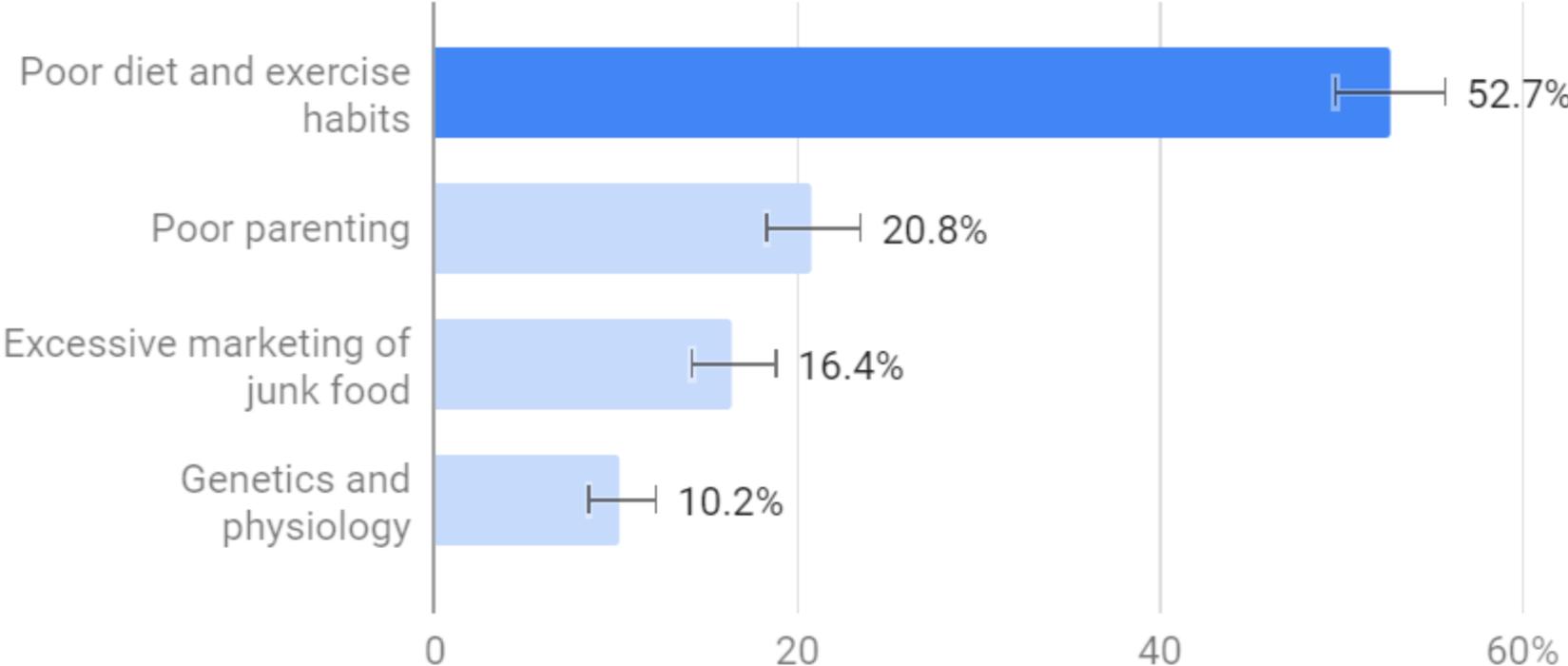


U.S. Respondents Were Very Similar

Genetics & Physiology Largely Dismissed

What do you believe is the primary cause of severe obesity when it occurs in young children?

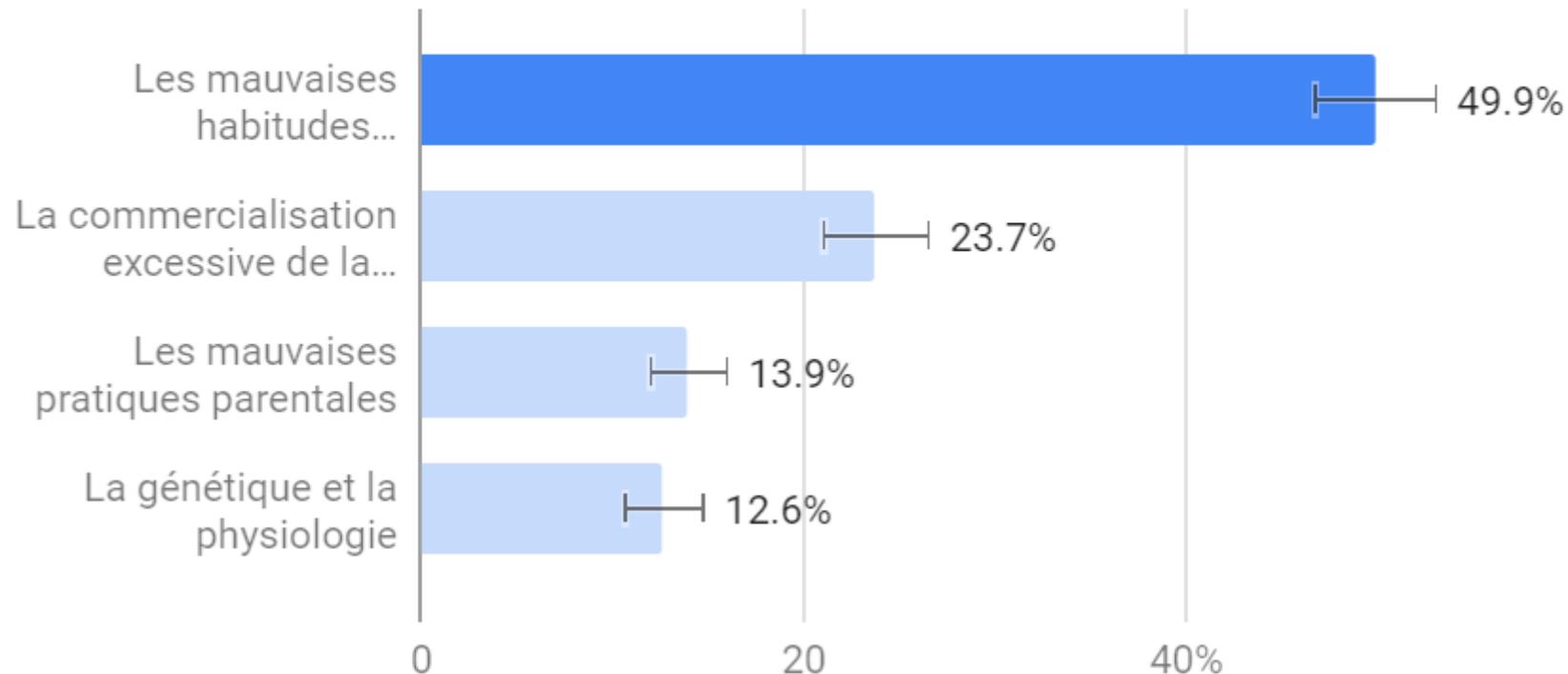
720 respondents



A Few More French Respondents Saw Problems with Junk Food Marketing

Quelle cause principale croyez-vous qui est en jeu lorsque l'obésité sévère apparaît chez de jeunes enfants?

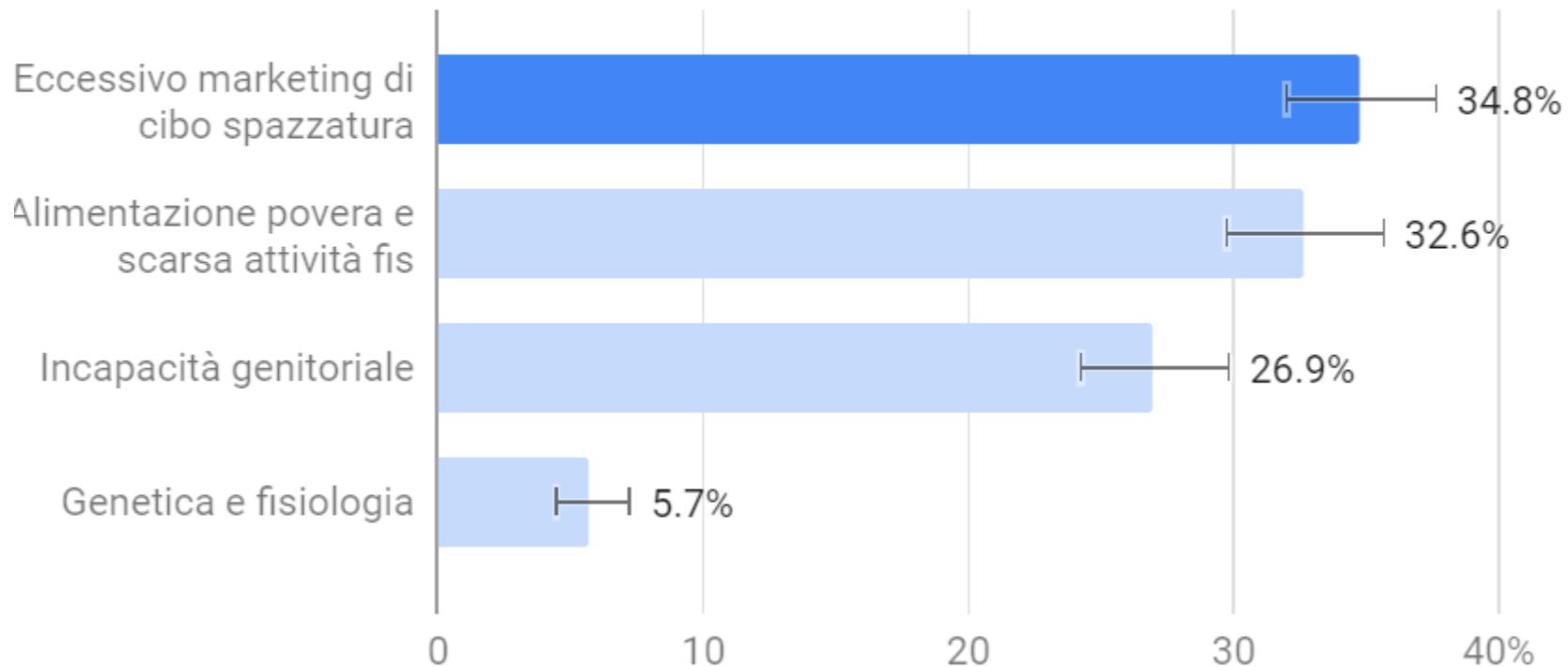
637 respondents



Italian Respondents Saw Both Junk Food Marketing & Poor Habits as Important

Quale crede sia la principale causa di obesità grave nei bambini piccoli?

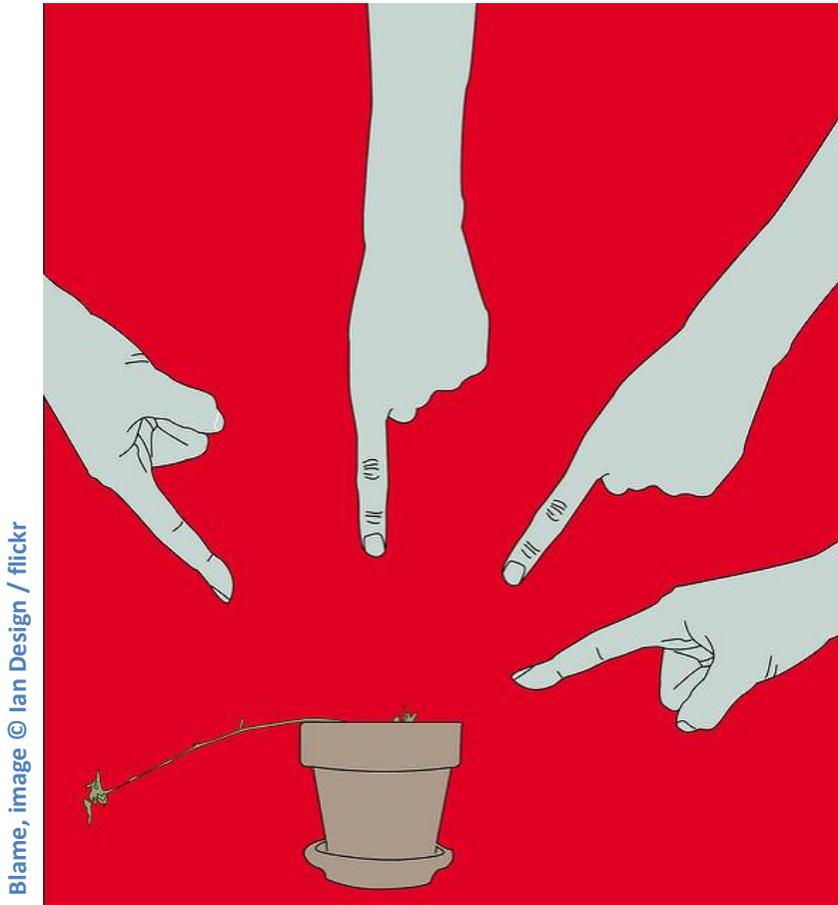
1,015 respondents



“Bad Habits” Dominates the Public View

- The public attributes severe childhood obesity to poor diet and exercise habits, even in young children
- French and especially Italian respondents have more concern about excessive junk food marketing
- Poor parenting was less of an issue than we expected
- Most respondents don't see genetics and physiology as important

The Bias Is Clear and Bias Gets in the Way of Progress



Blame, image © Ian Design / flickr

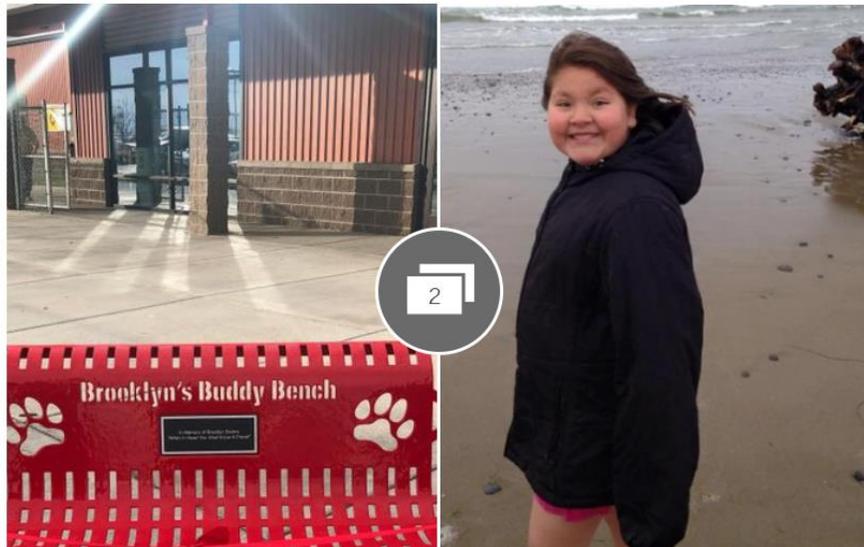
- **Stigma leads to denial and inaction**
 - Blame directed at people with obesity
 - Assumptions of
 - Laziness
 - Poor discipline
 - Social rejection
- **People seek less care, get poor care, so health suffers**
- **Leads to ineffective policies**

The Impact on Families and Youth Is Great



Classmate's bullying over weight led girl, 12, to kill herself, suit claims

Updated Apr 23, 2019; Posted Apr 22, 2019



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11-Year-Old Commits Suicide After Incessant Bullying Over His Weight

Phillip Spruill Jr.'s little brother was also bullied with homophobic slurs.

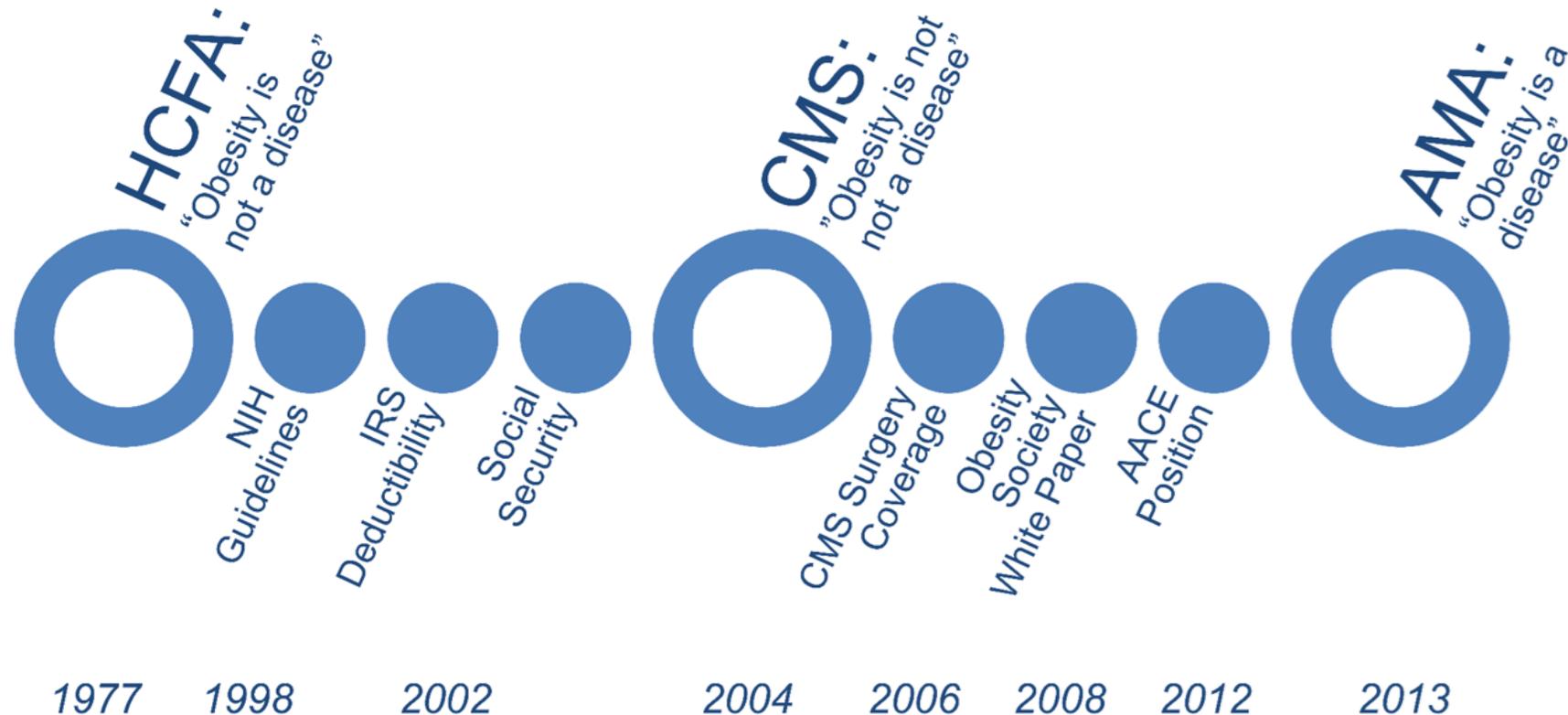
Written By [NewsOne Staff](#)
Posted April 12, 2019

So What We Have Is a Work in Progress



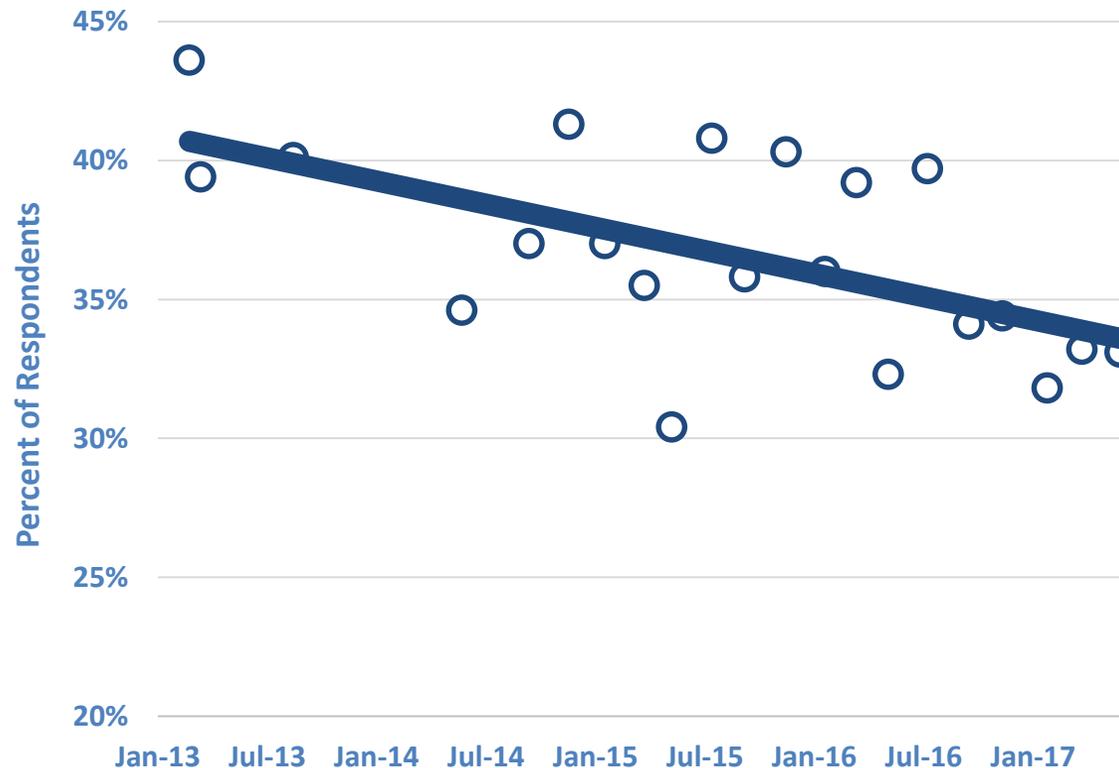
We See Progress As Health Authorities Recognize Obesity Is a Complex, Chronic Disease

Milestones in Regarding Obesity as a Disease



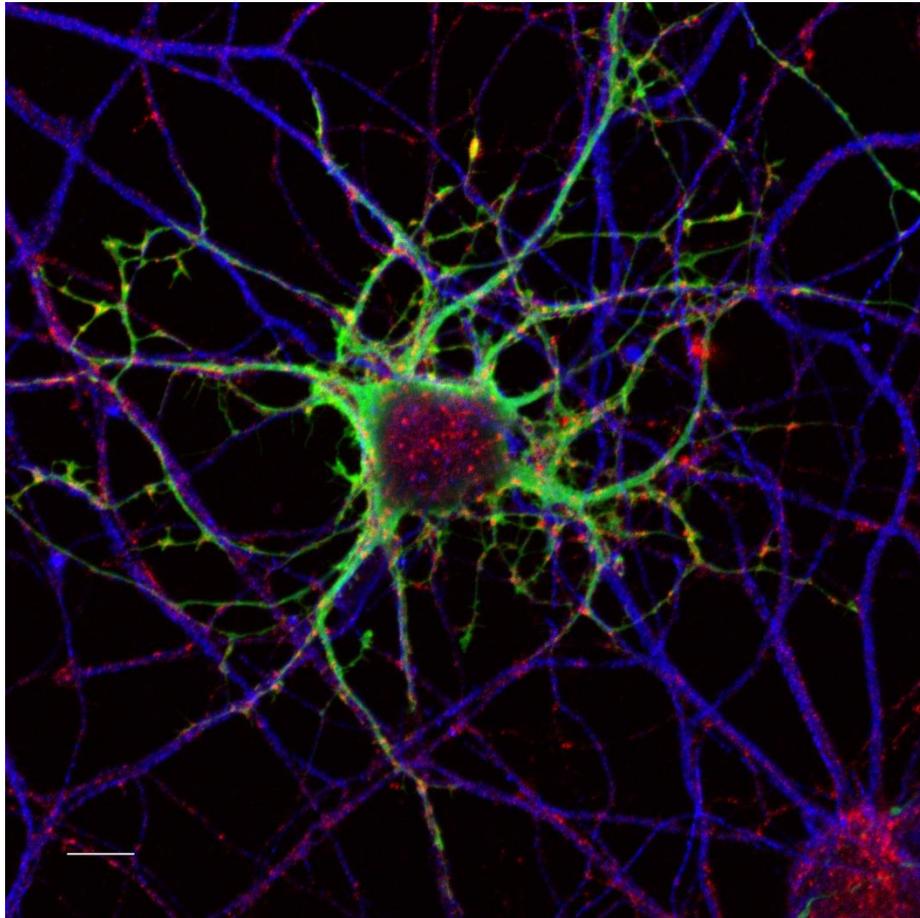
Explicit Public Views Are Slowly Shifting

“Obesity is a personal problem of bad choices”



- Fewer people think of obesity as a problem of bad personal choices
- People are shifting toward more diverse views of obesity

Obesity Science Is Bringing Better Insights and Solutions



Neurons, photograph © ZEISS Microscopy / flickr

- Hypothalamus controls fat mass and blood sugar
- More, better therapies on the horizon for obesity
- A growing evidence base for bariatric surgery in teens

Summary of Opportunities

Better progress will require:

- Objectivity to replace bias
- Curiosity about obesity and the people it affects
- Care for these people



Passion for the Precision of Watchmaking, photograph © Serge Barès / flickr

More Information



conscienhealth.org/news



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