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## RESEARCH TENDER CALL

### TENDER INFORMATION DOCUMENT

**Project Reference No.: 04-2024**


**Project Title: Overweight and obesity – understanding weight stigma and current discourses on the island of Ireland**

#### **1. 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 experiencing stigma across a number of settings including in healthcare, education, the workplace, the media and in personal relationships. Research shows physical and mental health consequences of experiencing obesity stigma. The current proposal aims to explore discourses on obesity and overweight in healthcare, at policy level and in the media, on the island of Ireland to facilitate more effective communication.

The key objectives of this research project are to:

- Explore the media discourse on overweight and obesity in broadcast (national and local radio, TV) and non-broadcast media (national and local newspapers) on the island of Ireland.
- Identify where obesity and overweight feature in public policy and implementation documentation, the language used and how obesity and overweight are framed and linked with other policies.
- Investigate key stakeholders (healthcare, policy, media and community representatives) general understanding of perception of overweight and obesity using qualitative research.
- Investigate citizens' perceptions on how the topic of is framed in the media.

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Ultimately, this research project and its recommendations could support a more effective way to communicate overweight and obesity across society and to destigmatise it.

## 2. **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 obesity often experience weight bias, stigma, and discrimination, this happens across society stigma can have a profound effect on how people are seen, treated and even how healthcare is delivered and experienced and may lead health inequalities for people living with obesity (4). Stigma is pervasive in society with people living with obesity experiencing stigma across a number of settings including in healthcare, education, the workplace, the media and in personal relationships. Sources of weight stigma include parents and families, work or school colleagues and friends, teachers and health professionals.

Weight stigma includes the negative social stereotypes, misconceptions and negative behaviours surrounding people living with overweight and obesity because of their weight and/or body size. Experiencing obesity stigma is linked with anxiety, lower self-esteem, social isolation, unhealthy eating and weight-control behaviours and higher exercise avoidance. Some studies indicate that individuals may delay seeking medical care, having an impact on treatment and prevention.

Media representation impacts behaviours, intentions and outcomes and may increase risk for long-term negative health consequences (5). The framing and portrayal of 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. A framing analysis during the same time found that the behaviour narrative was dominant (6). Baker et al found that the amount of reporting on obesity in newspapers in Britain 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 (7).

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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. This research is being undertaken to increase evidence about obesity aimed at eradicating obesity stigma (8).

### **3. Approach**

It is proposed that the aims and objectives of the current research are met by using a mixture of methods.

### **4. Technical Specification**

#### **(a) Scope of research**


The research should:

- Consider policy and implementation documents published over a period of at least 10 years with direct and indirect relevance to and for overweight and obesity.
- Consider media content published and broadcast over a period of at least 5 years. This should include text and imagery.
- From the above consider how the drivers of overweight and obesity were described, ensuing debates and which solutions were favoured by the different actors
- Ensure that public participants in the qualitative work represent different agenda in terms of social class, age, region and rural/urban and those with lived experience of overweight and obesity.
- Be collaborative across a number of relevant disciplines including experts in public health, policy, healthcare, content analysis and communications and other relevant fields.

**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**

It is proposed that the aim of the project be in-part achieved through an initial literature review of existing data to provide context and inform the research team. The literature

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review should include peer-reviewed publications and a systemised search of the grey literature. Detail must be provided regarding how the literature review will be structured and completed along with quality assurance mechanisms e.g., review by more than one researcher. A separate review of government and key health organisations reports, and conference proceedings should be conducted for the same time period as the formal literature review. Details on how the policy review will be conducted should be included.

(c) Qualitative and quantitative research

A full justification and rationale for the proposed methodology and analytical approach will be required. It will be necessary to indicate for all aspects of the project how the proposed data will be collected, analysed and reported. The research should be mixed in nature.

(d) Outline of proposed data sources

For this study, different data sources will be required. The researcher must enumerate 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:


- Review of relevant policy documents
- Media content analysis to build a dataset of relevant newspaper articles and broadcast media pieces to identify stakeholders
- Focus groups and/or qualitative methods with key stakeholder's (policy makers, media, healthcare providers, researchers, those with lived experience and the public)

(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

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- 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


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 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**

- Recommendations on how to communicate overweight and obesity to different audiences, including guidance for the healthcare sector.
- Guidance for reporters and journalists
- Similarities and differences between Northern Ireland and Ireland in reporting and framing of the subject.
- Differences of how national and local media and broadcast outlets in both jurisdictions report the topic and how they are perceived by audiences.
- Differences in the importance and types of media outlets and reporting/framing of overweight and obesity.
- 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.

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## 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 and the inclusion of key stakeholders in the qualitative research (journalists, policy makers, healthcare professionals, influencers)
- ✓ 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 including public health nutrition and media analysis;
- ✓ Quality Assurance and Quality Control measures in place.

## 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 [www.safefood.net/research-tender](http://www.safefood.net/research-tender). They can also be obtained by emailing [research@safefood.net](mailto:research@safefood.net), quoting the project reference number **04-2024**. 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 10<sup>th</sup> May 2024**.

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7. 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.
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