



DO FAT GIRLS GET AHEAD?

*In a time when we value appearance, **MMABATHO MPHAHLELE** finds out if being overweight can be a stumbling block in your career.*

how you look. In the study, 21% of executives said being overweight lessens the chances of success for a woman, while 17% said it hurts a man's career. The numbers more than doubled for obesity.

Dineo, 33, a marketing executive from Pretoria, lost her job three years ago and has been struggling to find a new one. "I got depressed after I was retrenched and turned to food for comfort. I gained a lot of weight.

"I've been to many interviews in the past year but I think my weight is a stumbling block because image is everything in the marketing industry," she says.

NEED TO BE THIN

Whether Dineo's assumption is true or not, there are legal loopholes that can protect companies that reject overweight employees. Career coach Michelle Stewart says if being slim is an inherent requirement of the job then an employer must appoint a suitable person. A company could argue that having a receptionist who is overweight could be a bad reflection on their business image.

Companies can be reluctant to hire larger people because, according to research, those who are overweight tend to be perceived as being lazy,

and lacking energy, self-discipline and ambition. Employers also worry they might have more health problems and will be absent more often.

TAKE ACTION

If you think you are being discriminated against because of your weight, get your facts straight before you take any action.

Ask the organisation to give you feedback on why your application was unsuccessful. You can also do this if you feel that your employer is not promoting you because of your weight. **R**

used to think that fat-girl problems ended at school and as people matured they stopped discriminating against their overweight peers, especially at work. But it seems I was wrong. According to a 2011 study by Harvard Medical School and Massachusetts General Hospital, people assess your competence and trustworthiness in a quarter of a second, based solely on

YOUR RIGHTS

Section 6 of the Employment Equity Act prohibits unfair discrimination against an employee or job applicant on arbitrary grounds, including race, sex, disability, age and physical appearance.

If you are discriminated against in the workplace because you are overweight, you can call the CCMA on 011 377 6650/6600 to get help.

HELP YOURSELF

Career expert Penny Holburn gives the following tips to turn your situation around if you think your weight is holding you back.

- Eat healthily and exercise. Talk about how you do this in interviews and do this in the workplace.
- Be confident, energetic and enthusiastic in interviews and at work.
- Control your sick leave and absenteeism.
- Dress well and appropriately for your size. Wear clothes that fit.
- Be clean and neat. Good grooming is essential.
- When negotiating for a promotion, show examples of situations where you have worked extra hours and gone the extra mile. Show how you are hard working and committed and have the drive to get the work done.