

What happens to people who join a community weight management programme?

Long-term outcomes up to seven years after first joining

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Introduction

Obesity is a chronic condition requiring on-going or intermittent support. Slimming World is a community weight management service, allowing people to access weekly support as and when required. Members are encouraged to eat a balanced diet, and gradually increase their physical activity, with facilitated peer-support to enable successful long-term behaviour change and weight loss maintenance. Once members reach their (self-determined) personal target weight, they can access the support free of charge for as long as they wish. Long-term outcomes of such support in a self-funded setting is understudied. The aim of this study was to evaluate outcomes of self-funding adults who first joined Slimming World in 2016 and were still accessing the service at least two years later.

Methods

This study was a secondary analysis of a dataset of over one million self-funding adults who first joined Slimming World in 2016. Weight records for those attending between January 2018 and January 2023 were extracted and analysed using last observation carried forward. Data was also collected on those achieving at least 10% weight loss, and for those who reached their personal target weight. Socioeconomic status was assessed using the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) where decile one represents those living within the 10% most deprived areas of England, and decile 10 represents those living in the 10% least deprived areas.

Results

In total, 100,559 members (9.2% of those who first joined in 2016) were included in this analysis, 8.5% of whom were male. Characteristics at baseline for the sample are shown in Table 1.

Results

Table 1: Baseline characteristics of members upon joining in 2016

	All	Female	Male
n (%)	100,559	92,031 (91.5%)	8,529 (8.5%)
Age (years)	49.4 ±13.8	49.3 ±13.8	51 ±13.3
Joining BMI (kg/m ²)	33.9 ±6.8	33.6 ±6.8	36.2 ±6.9
Joining Weight (kg)	92.1 ±20.9	90.1 ±19.4	113.5 ±23.9

93.7% were matched to an IMD decile with 24.2% (n=22,790) in the lowest three deciles (i.e., deciles 1-3) and 35.5% (n=33,345) in the highest three deciles (i.e., deciles 8-10).

Those who were older at baseline were more likely to have attended more recently although the relationship was weak, (r=0.19, p<0.001), whilst correlations with other characteristics such as joining BMI and IMD were not meaningful (both r<0.001).

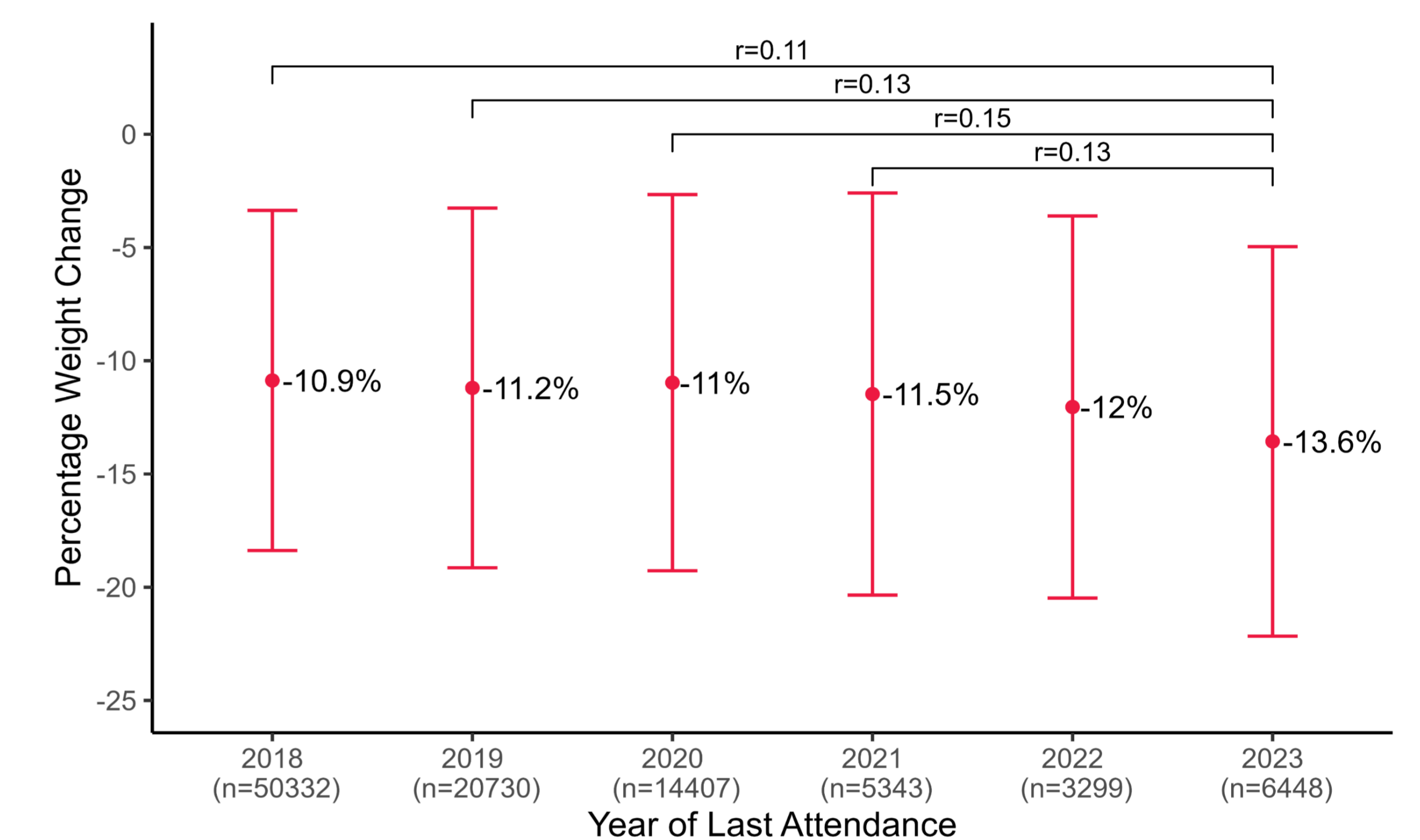
Mean change in weight and BMI (SD) at follow-up (2 to 7 years after joining) was -11.2% (7.9%) and -3.9 (3.2) kg/m², respectively.

In total, 18.6% of members were at their personal target weight at follow-up and showed a mean change in weight and BMI (SD) of 15.8% (8.0%) and -5.0 (3.4) kg/m², respectively.

A Kruskal-Wallis test showed negligible differences in percentage weight change by year of last of attendance ($\chi^2(5) = 718.2, p<0.001, H<.01$), ranging between -10.9% to -13.6% (see Figure 1).

Results

Figure 1: Percentage weight change by year of last attendance



Note: Post-hoc Bonferroni adjusted comparisons are plotted where $r \geq 0.1$

In total, 71% (71,614/100,559) of this sample who first joined in 2016 achieved a 10% weight loss or more at the end of that year. At their last recorded attendance, two to seven years after first joining, 67.9% of these members had either maintained or achieved further weight loss.

Conclusions

This analysis shows long-term weight outcomes achieved by adults from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds two to seven years after first receiving support from Slimming World. At their last recorded attendance, almost 20% were attending at their personal target weight and around 70% maintained a 10% weight loss that was achieved within the first year. Although this analysis doesn't explore if continuous or intermittent support was accessed, these data highlight the importance of open-ended support in successful obesity management