



## BODY DYSMORPHIA AND EATING DISORDERS IN TEENAGERS IN DELHI NCR

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**ABSTRACT** According to the American Psychiatric Association the term Eating Disorders refers to “a psychological impairment characterised by body appearance concerns, intensive distress and disturbed eating behaviours”. The purpose of this research paper is to study whether pressure to be thin can impact the mental health of teenagers and can cause issues like body dysmorphia and eating disorders for them.

**KEYWORDS :** Eating Disorder, Body Dysmorphia, Teenagers

### INTRODUCTION

The term ED described by the American Psychiatric Association (2020) refers to a psychological impairment characterised by body appearance concerns, intensive distress and disturbed eating behaviours. Along with the six main feeding and EDs recognized in diagnostic systems—*anorexia nervosa*, *bulimia nervosa*, *binge ED*, *avoidant-restrictive food intake disorder*, *pica*, and *ruminant disorder*—a further category, *subthreshold eating*. *Body dysmorphic disorder (BDD)*, or *body dysmorphia*, is a mental health condition where a person spends a lot of time worrying about flaws in their appearance. These flaws are often unnoticeable to others. (NHS) Food is one of the basic needs that is needed for survival of human beings. It is also one of things that everybody needs to grow physically but also mentally too. It is important to have a healthy relationship with it, especially for teenagers. At homes or schools the problems faced by teenagers are not often discussed and are overlooked.

The problem is only paid heed when the situation gets worse. One of the biggest problems in today's time faced by teenagers are eating disorders and body dysmorphia. Both of them are concerned with one's body appearance. Teenagers are quite particular with how they look, dress and eat. As one feels constantly being scrutinised and monitored, teens can feel easily pressured by their friends, family and society to look a certain manner and thus achieve that ideal body type. Unhealthy pre-teen and teenage body image is directly related to low self-esteem, which can lead to anxiety, anger and low mood.

Young people who are feeling down are more likely to focus on the negative messages around them and make negative comparisons between their bodies and what they see as 'ideal' bodies. Low self-esteem and poor body image are risk factors for the development of risky weight loss strategies, eating disorders and mental health disorders like depression. (1)

Their mind tells them that it is the only way to be accepted and be loved by everyone.

### Illusion Vs Reality

Today we are living in a technology advanced society. Kids are obsessed with social media and will naively believe anything that's posted over there. For them to believe they have any psychological disorder is quite easy. Let's imagine a situation, a girl is eating less because she's on her period and may see a post regarding ED on Instagram and starts to believe that she has it. Another case is if you wake up one morning and you know you have a maths test later that day, it's normal to be nervous or anxious about the test. Your heart might pound and your stomach might churn, and you might be thinking a lot about the test and your possible result. Once the test is over, you're likely more relaxed, and physically back to normal but if you wake up one morning and, for no reason, are convinced that something bad will happen to a loved one, think about it all day, and then continue to have intrusive thoughts about it the next day, that may be a sign of an anxiety disorder. (2) The same way it's really important to know the difference between what's a real eating disorder and what's not. If a person has the following symptoms listed below, then they should consult a psychologist (Mayo clinic) (3).

- Exercising much more than the average person. This includes not taking rest days or days off for injury or illness or refusing to attend

- social events or other life events because of wanting to exercise.
- Calluses on the knuckles from reaching fingers into the mouth to cause vomiting.
- Problems with loss of tooth enamel that may be a sign of repeated vomiting.
- Leaving during meals or right after a meal to use the toilet.
- Talk of depression, disgust, shame or guilt about eating habits.
- Eating in secret
- Skipping meals or snacks or making excuses for not eating.
- Having a very limited diet that hasn't been prescribed by a trained medical professional.
- Too much focus on food or healthy eating, especially if it means not participating in usual events, such as sports banquets, eating birthday cake or dining out.
- Making their own meals rather than eating what the family eats.
- Withdrawing from usual social activities.
- Frequent and ongoing worry or complaints about being unhealthy or overweight and talk of losing weight.
- Frequent checking in the mirror for what are thought to be flaws.
- Repeatedly eating large amounts of food.

### Family Ignorance and Lack of Awareness

Building a healthy relationship with food should be one of the main key focus areas for teenagers. One of the main roles in this would be of the parents. The parent needs to make sure about the child eating properly. But that doesn't mean that the child has to be monitored constantly about it. During teen years the child is sensitive about every aspect of their life. Defined eating habits at home implemented by parents might trigger a negative response from them. They might feel that they are pressured to be fit if they are always being forced to eat healthy. Parents should never make a remark if their kid is eating too much or they have gained weight or the opposite. Such comments can replay in their mind constantly and will make them feel demotivated and can create a negative image about food in their mind.

Many communities lack identification or knowledge of eating disorders (4). Many cases the child eating less may be called a phase by the parent or they might not pay too much attention towards it. Most parents tend to come back to the problem only when it gets worse. If your child may have doubts or concerns about what he's doing, if he sees that you are not taking action, he will ultimately think, "See, I'm really fine. There's nothing wrong with what I'm doing. If my parents aren't concerned, then obviously I'm OK" (5). Sometimes you can help just by actively listening to how your child is feeling about the physical changes of puberty. This means really paying attention to your child's concerns and showing that you care and are interested in what they're saying. If your child is feeling confused, you can reassure them that the changes are a natural part of growing up.

It's also good to talk with your child about images on social and other media. Some images set unrealistic ideals for pre-teens and teenagers. But you can help by explaining how the images are often digitally manipulated so that people look more 'beautiful' than they really are (6). There can also be cases where the parents might notice the signs of their kids developing an eating disorder but wouldn't know how to help them. The biggest mistake they can make in this scenario is going on the internet. There are a lot of views present out there. Hearing so many different opinions all at once can make any parent feel overwhelmed and conflicted on how to handle the situation delicately. The right way

to deal with this would be to approach the child first and have an honest conversation with them. Then consult a psychologist or a counsellor regarding it.

**Exposure To Media**

A research from the Education Policy Institute and The Prince's Trust (2021) said wellbeing and self-esteem were similar in all children of primary school age. Boys and girls' wellbeing is affected at the age of 14, but girls' mental health drops more after that, it found. A lack of exercise is another contributing factor - exacerbated by the pandemic, the study said.

According to the research:

- One in three girls was unhappy with their personal appearance by the age of 14, compared with one in seven at the end of primary school
- The number of young people with probable mental illness has risen to one in six, up from one in nine in 2017
- Boys in the bottom set at primary school had lower self-esteem at 14 than their peers

Heavy social media usage can take a toll on a teenager's mental health. The media's portrayal of an ideal body is quite unrealistic. When children are low in self-esteem they can turn to social media for solace or community. Seeing other people posting on the internet and then feeling more low can create a toxic cycle for them. Exposure to magazines and television can create dissatisfaction and promote unhealthy eating habits (7). You might have heard quite often that whatever they say on the internet is not true. This is a fact that most of us forget. Media generally is influenced by influential sources to post their pictures online that represent the ideal body.

**The Evil Fashion Industry**

Female Fashion Models seem to promote what is aesthetic beauty which is in plain words being slim and lean. The industry has also seemed to be labelling people with average weight as toxic. A person who has an underbelly is considered to be unhealthy (8). The whole fashion industry is fatphobic and keeps promoting unrealistic beauty standards. Teenager girls are highly influenced by the model industry. The teenage girls have been said to adapt eating disorders like starving, as they try to attain the 'ideal' figure, as referred to by the fashion industry. Models expose their bodies all over in magazines, televisions and movies. Teenagers feel the need to identify with famous, rich and beautiful models. Some of them even want to join the same field in future. They adopt unhealthy eating habits as a starting point towards beginning their modelling career (9). It is quite sad to see that the idols that they worship are in fact living a terrible life. The models do get treated badly themselves. In China a practice was followed was that girls who wanted to enter the fashion industry had to maintain a standard weight. If there was even a difference of 1 cm then they would be refused to get paid. It is not common to see plus size models on the runway or on the cover of a famous magazine. They have deemed being fat as a non-moral thing in this life.

**OBJECTIVE**

To understand and analyse the reasons for body dysmorphia and eating disorders issues in teenagers in Delhi NCR.

**Sub Objectives**

- To understand how parents lack awareness on the topic of ED and Body Dysmorphia and how it can affect the child.
- To understand the factors causing such issues in teenagers
- To understand how the pressure to be thin can affect the child's mental health

**Research Design**

Descriptive method was used by the researcher for the study. The researcher was directed towards understanding the reasons that can cause eating disorders and body dysmorphia in teenagers

**Sampling**

In this research study 47 teenagers ranging from age group 13-18 were randomly chosen.

Male: 12 respondents  
Female: 35 respondents

**Data Collection Tools**

The researcher collected the data with the employment of self-prepared questionnaires. The questionnaire was translated from

English to Hindi by the researcher while conducting online data collection by filling out a google form.

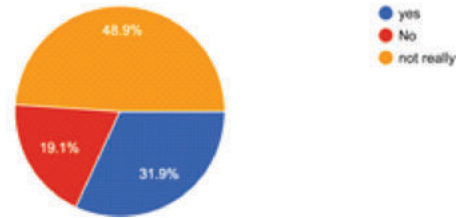
**Data Analysis**

In the context of above, the following findings were apparent:

Q1) Is there a compulsion by your parents on you to eat healthy food?

Do your parents force you to eat healthy?

47 responses



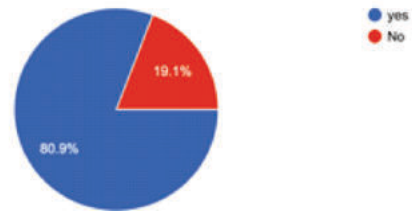
**Figure 1.1**

When asking the respondents if their parents forced them to eat healthy about and 31.9% answered yes and 48.9% respondents answered saying Not Really. 19.1% respondents answered saying no. There has been found a direct association between child weight and parenting, as child weight can influence what parenting practices are used (10). Parenting styles have an indirect effect on children's outcomes: parenting styles moderate the effect of parenting practices because they influence the effectiveness of specific parenting practices (11). For example Hughes and colleagues classify caregivers as having an authoritative, authoritarian, indulgent or uninvolved child-feeding style based on their use of demanding or responsive child-feeding behaviours and attitudes (12). Thus the pie chart depicts that the majority of the parents have adopted a moderative style of parenting, giving their child freedom regarding in the matter of eating.

Q2) Awareness on the topic of Body Dysmorphia and Eating Disorder

Are you familiar with the terms of eating disorders and body dysmorphia?

47 responses



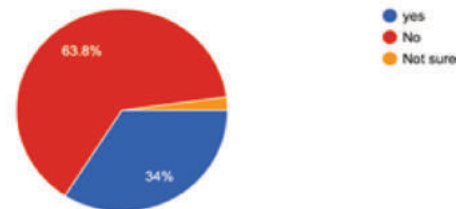
**Figure 1.2**

The respondents were asked if they are familiar with the terms of eating disorders and body dysmorphia about 80.9% respondents said yes and the rest 19.1% said no. It was also further studied that between the age group of 13-15 years most of them were not aware of the terms. This states that there is also a lack of identification regarding eating disorders among children themselves.

Q3) Have you encountered either of the two in real life?

Have you ever experienced either of the two in real life?

47 responses



**Figure 1.3**

The respondents were asked if they have experienced either body dysmorphia or eating disorder in real life. About 63.8% respondents answered No, 34% answered yes and 2.1% answered not sure. Although the majority sided with no still the inference proves that both of the psychological disorders is something faced by teens in today's time. It was also studied that many teens between the age of 16-18 experienced it in real life rather than teens between the age group of 13-15.

Q4) Do you find yourself staring into your reflection often whenever passing by a mirror?

Do you constantly find yourself looking in the mirror ?

47 responses

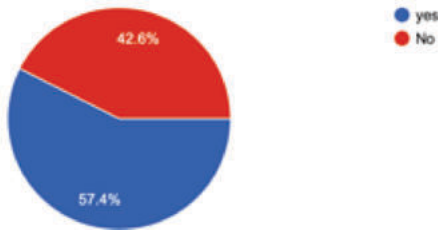


Figure 1.4

The respondents were asked if they constantly find themselves looking in the mirror. About 57.4% respondents answered yes and 42.6% answered saying no to the question. The question asked above is one of the main symptoms of body dysmorphia. Since the majority said yes it validates the opinion that teenagers are quite sensitive about their overall appearance. Teenagers grow up seeing what is a good looking body and what is not so good looking body shape: they create a perception in their minds and feel like they have to live up to in order to feel validated by society's stereotypes (13). Checking yourself out in the mirror constantly leads to one feeling conscious and demotivated regarding their own body appearance. It creates an unhealthy obsession with one's own flaws.

Q5) How many times a week do you monitor your weight?

how many times a week do you check your weight?

47 responses

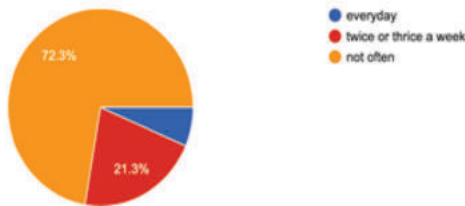


Figure 1.5

Survey participants were inquired about the frequency of their weight checks per week. They were presented with three response options: "everyday," "twice or thrice a week," and "not often." The results revealed that the largest portion, constituting 72.3% of respondents, indicated they checked their weight "not often." Approximately 21.3% reported checking their weight "twice or thrice a week," while the remaining 6.4% stated they checked it "everyday."

Frequent monitoring of one's weight can lead to an unhealthy cycle, wherein individuals adjust their eating habits to align with their desired weight. The significance of the number on the scale extends beyond mood; it shapes daily plans and objectives. Often, the day's trajectory is influenced by this numerical value (14), potentially leading to self-imposed restrictions or excessive consumption. Such behaviour can foster an unhealthy and unsustainable relationship with food.

Q6) Do you always fantasise about looking like your favourite idols?

do you often daydream about looking like models?

47 responses

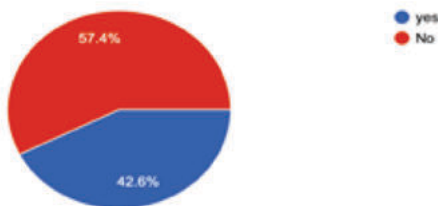


Figure 1.6

The respondents were asked if they often daydream about looking like models. About 57.4% answered saying no and the remaining 42.6% answered yes. It was further studied that between the age group of 13-15 most of them answered saying yes proving that the young generation is highly influenced by the model industry. One of the most

potent outside influences on teens today is social media, with its images of unblemished, well-groomed, muscular, "perfect" people—both celebrities and peers

(15). Most teen girls consider highly famous models, actors and influencers as their role models. They would blindly follow anything that their role models do and say. They are even willing to go on extreme diets and majorly change their appearance to look like them. So it's important for the people in the spotlight to set good examples for kids.

Q7) Did you ever feel you were not healthy due to someone's negative comment towards you?

have you ever thought that you were healthy but somebody's remark about your body weight made you feel you were not?

47 responses

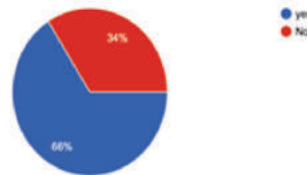


Figure 1.7

The respondents were asked the question if they have ever felt that they were healthy but somebody's remark regarding their body weight made them feel that they were not. The majority of the respondents-66% answered yes and the remaining 34% answered no. The above figure validates the opinion that teens are quite particular about what other people say about them. Whether it is family, teachers or friends one should always be very careful of their words. A negative remark can deeply affect one's mental health. The words might not be intentionally said to hurt the teen's sentiments but those words can constantly replay in their mind and make them feel very conscious about their appearance. Adolescents with negative body images are more likely to be depressed, anxious and suicidal than those without intense dissatisfaction over their appearance, even when compared to adolescents with other psychiatric illnesses, according to a 2006 study by researchers at Bradley Hospital, Butler Hospital and Brown Medical School (16).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, promoting awareness about eating disorders and body dysmorphia within communities and among children is of paramount importance. Ensuring that parents are well-informed about these issues is crucial, as a lack of awareness can potentially endanger their children's well-being. It's essential for teenagers to exercise critical thinking and discernment when consuming online content, as not everything presented on the internet is accurate or beneficial. Additionally, the impact of social media on adolescents should not be underestimated. Excessive use of social mediaplatforms can lead to various negative outcomes, including academic distractions, disruptions to sleep patterns, exposure to cyberbullying and rumours, unrealistic perceptions of others' lives, and susceptibility to peer pressure. The extent of these risks is often correlated with the amount of time teenagers spend on social media platforms. Therefore, fostering a balanced approach to social media usage and cultivating digital literacy are vital components in safeguarding the well-being and mental health of today's youth.

Appendix

- <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/12CBibjt5oJpvZ-GVQFXxLVUPRAoQaU6R Rm6Oy5powLk/viewform>

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