

Assessment of Body Image and Self Esteem among Young Adolescents



Medical Science

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Body image encompasses an individual's body-related self-perceptions and self-attitudes, and is linked to self-esteem, interpersonal confidence, eating and exercise behaviours, sexual experiences and emotional stability. Because adolescents experience significant physical changes in their bodies during puberty, they are likely to experience highly dynamic perceptions of body image. Negative body image has been associated with a plethora of psychological ills from eating disorders to major depression. Present study aimed at evaluating body image among school-going adolescents and assessing the strength of relationship between body image, self-esteem and psychological distress among adolescent population.

Materials & Methods: A cross sectional research study was carried out in students of IX and X Standard of a English Medium High School (CBSE). A total of 139 students were included and asked to fill out a set of questions comprising of: General Health Questionnaire- 28, Rosenberg's Self Esteem Scale and; Body Image Questionnaire. Data was analyzed with appropriate statistical tests using SPSS software ver. 21

Results: Various factors associated with negative body image were female gender, listening to other's opinion and dieting. Poor self-esteem as measured by Rosenberg scale and poor general health as measured by GHQ-28 questionnaire was significantly associated with negative body image.

Conclusion: The study findings demonstrate that adolescent girls have more body image dissatisfaction as compared to boys and positive body image will lead to higher levels of self-esteem and self-worth. Plans have been made with school authorities regarding counselling sessions/ stress management workshops to help with the body image issues. We also recommend conducting regular programmes to address issues like academic counselling, sex education, health education, self-acceptance and developing peer relationships.

INTRODUCTION

Body image is a dynamic perception of one's body— how it looks, feels, and moves. It is shaped by perception, emotions, physical sensations, and is not static, but can change in relation to mood, physical experience, and environment. Body image is linked to self-esteem, interpersonal confidence, eating and exercise behaviours, sexual experiences and emotional stability. Among adults, body satisfaction has been associated with fulfilment with personal interactions [1] and overall life happiness [2], healthy dietary choices and physical activity performance [3], and increased sexual pleasure and activity frequency [4]. Conversely, among adolescent youth, body shape and body weight dissatisfaction have been associated with a plethora of psychological ills from eating disorders [5, 6] to major depression [5–7].

Self-esteem is a measure of one's sense of self-worth based on perceived success and achievements, as well as a perception of how much one is valued by peers, family members, teachers and society and general [8]. Important co-relates of good self-esteem are one's positive physical appearance and high value to peers and family, secondary feature of self-esteem relate to academic achievements, athletic abilities and special talents.

Adolescence is a time of increasingly heightened self-scrutiny and greatly fluctuating self-esteem. Adolescents have varying levels of self-esteem, which appears to be influenced by such factors as gender, ethnicity, and social class. It can also vary within an individual—an adolescent may

have different levels of self-esteem in different domains such as social, scholastics, athletics, appearance, and general conduct and actions [9].

Physical appearance has been shown studies to be one of the biggest predictors of an adolescent's self-esteem. There is a strong correlation between teenagers who express dissatisfaction with their appearance and those who have low levels of self-esteem [8].

For adolescent girls particularly, the social pressures exerted by constant media messages about the perceived ideal body type can cause significant levels of dissatisfaction about their body. This is compounded by increased anxiety in relation to the changes that are occurring within a girl's body and the constant subtle and, not so subtle, comparisons to peers and others [5].

The results of low self-esteem can be temporary, but in serious cases can lead to various problems including depression, anorexia nervosa, delinquency, self-inflicted injuries and even suicide. Self-esteem is related to school performance and delinquency. Adolescents with low self-esteem are more likely to perform poorly at school, to become pregnant, or to impregnate a partner [8].

Thus, present study aimed at evaluating body image among school-going adolescents and assessing the strength of relationship between body image, self-esteem and psychological distress among adolescent population.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This was a cross sectional research study carried out from 1st September to 30th October 2015 in students studying in IX and X Standard of Bharati Vidyapeeth English Medium High School (CBSE), Pune after seeking approval from the Institutional Ethics Committee of Bharati Vidyapeeth University and School authorities. All the students were provided detailed information about study.

Only students whose parents or guardians signed the informed consent and who were regularly enrolled in the school during 2015-16 session were included. A total of 153 students were chosen to participate, of whom 14 were excluded for not appropriately completing the questionnaire or not participating in anthropometric assessments; thus a final sample of 139 adolescents was assessed. All the students were asked to fill out a set of questions comprising of:

1. Specially designed Socio-demographic proforma
2. General Health Questionnaire- 28 (GHQ-28) [10]
3. Rosenberg's Self Esteem Scale [11]
4. Body Image Questionnaire [11]

General Health Questionnaire 28, is divided into four subscales each containing: somatic symptoms, anxiety/insomnia, social dysfunction, severe depression. A score of >4 out of 28 indicates probable psychological distress. Rosenberg's Self Esteem Scale is a ten item likert scale to measure self-esteem by asking respondents to reflect on their current feelings and higher score indicates higher self-esteem. Body Image Questionnaire co-relates perceived body image with gender, health and current and future emotional adjustment and interpreted on factors like Satisfaction (Positive)/Dissatisfaction (Negative), Activity/ Passivity.

Statistical Analysis

All the data was entered in Microsoft Excel sheet 2013 and analyzed using SPSS software ver. 21. Qualitative variables were presented as frequency and percentages and compared using Fisher's Exact test. Ordinal variables like self-esteem score and GHQ-28 were presented as mean and SD and compared using Man-Whitney U test. A p-value of < 0.05 was taken as level of significance.

RESULTS

The mean age of study group was 14.9 +/- 1.3 years with slight male predominance (56.8% vs 43.2%). Out of the 60 adolescent girls, 38 (63.3%) had negative body image as compared to 17 boys (21.5%) out of 79 ($p < 0.01$). About 95% and 66% of the students who were either dieting (21/22) or listening to other's opinion to improve their appearance (44/67) were shown to have negative body image ($p < 0.01$). Low self-esteem was observed in 21% of the adolescents of which 65.5% (19/29) were having negative body image ($p < 0.01$). Poor health as per GHQ-28 was noticed in 69.1% adolescents, of which 41.7% (40/96) were having negative body image ($p < 0.01$). So, various factors associated with negative body image in present study were female gender, listening to other's opinion and dieting (Table 1).

Mean scores on Rosenberg scale and GHQ-28 of adolescents with negative body image were 6.22 and 18.09 as compared to 8.76 and 21.3 in adolescents with positive body image. Poor self-esteem as measured by Rosenberg scale and poor general health as measured by GHQ-28 questionnaire was significantly associated with negative body image (Table 2).

DISCUSSION

The present study aimed at evaluating body image among adolescents and assessing its relationship with self-esteem. As adolescents experience significant physical changes in their bodies during puberty, they are likely to experience highly dynamic perceptions of body image. Going through the puberty can amplify body image concerns. Puberty for boys brings characteristics typically admired by society—height, speed, broadness, and strength. Puberty for girls brings with it characteristics often perceived as less laudable, as girls generally get rounder and have increased body fat. These changes can serve to further enhance dissatisfaction among girls. Going through puberty later or earlier than peers can have an impact on body image as well as psychological health. Generally, early development for girls and late development for boys present the greatest challenges to healthy body image.

In present study, we observed differences in body image among adolescents at the baseline evaluation. More adolescent's girls reported negative body image as compared to boys (63.3% vs 21.5%; $p < 0.01$). Our results co-relates well with several previous studies [8,13,14] and indicates that girls are more concerned about their physical appearance and behavioural body experiences.

Poor body image leads adolescents to listen more to other's opinion and practice various measure for correction including dieting. In present study 22 (15.8%) adolescents were on diet of which 21 (95.5%) were having a negative perception about body image. Various studies have shown that dieting in the past or present, relates to dissatisfaction with their body mass distribution either underweight or overweight [14-16].

Self-esteem is a positive or negative attitude toward oneself and can be viewed as a key indicator of psychological well-being. Various factors affect the self-esteem of adolescents, but there are good reasons to propose that changes in body image may be crucial for understanding this trend. Body image is central to an adolescent's self-definition, because they have been socialized to believe that appearance is an important basis for self-evaluation and for evaluation by others. Indeed, perceptions of appearance and self-worth are inextricably linked, such that perceived appearance consistently emerges as the strongest single predictor of self-esteem among both male and female adolescents. Adolescents with negative body image concerns are also more likely to have psychological symptoms like depression, anxiety and suicidal tendencies than those without dissatisfaction over their appearance, even when compared to adolescents with other psychiatric illnesses [8].

In present study lower self-esteem and poor psychological health was significantly associated with negative body image. These findings are comparable with current literature, which demonstrates that body image has a significant correlation with self-esteem [8, 15-17] and risk of developing psychiatric disorders [18,19]. Negative body image and low self-esteem has negative psycho-social effects and increase the risk for psychological distress in these adolescents [8].

These issues are of particular concern during adolescence, not only because adolescence is an important period for forming views about one-self and socio-cultural ideals, but also because the onset of puberty entails bodily changes (such as greater adipose deposits, and acne) that, on average, move girls further away from societal standards of female beauty.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

The study findings demonstrate that adolescent girls have more body image dissatisfaction as compared to boys and positive body image will lead to higher levels of self-esteem and self-worth. Since a large proportion of adolescents with negative body image and even with positive body image were found to be having psychological distress, plans have been made with school authorities regarding counselling sessions/ stress management workshops to help with the same. We also recommend conducting regular programmes to address issues like academic counselling, sex education, health education, self-acceptance and developing peer relationships. The constancy of body image dissatisfaction among adolescent's points to the need for future research throughout early developmental periods as there is limited data in this regard.

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Table 1. Association of various factors with body Image of subjects

Variables	Body Image (n-139)				p-value
	Positive (n-84)		Negative (n-55)		
Gender - Girls (n-60)	22	36.7%	38	63.3%	< 0.01
Dieting (n-22)	1	4.5%	21	95.5%	< 0.01
Listening to Other's opinion (n-67)	23	34.3%	44	65.7%	< 0.01
Low Self Esteem Levels (n-29)	10	34.5%	19	65.5%	< 0.01
Poor General Health (n-96)	56	58.3%	40	41.7%	< 0.01

Table 2. Association between psychological distress and self-esteem with Body Image

Variables	Body Image (n-139)				P-value
	Positive (n-84)		Negative (n-55)		
	mean	SD	mean	SD	
GHQ - 28	8.76	4.18	6.22	4.66	< 0.01
Rosenberg Scale	21.27	3.35	18.09	3.46	< 0.01

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