

To Study the Correlation between Body Image and Self Esteem in Adolescents and Young Adults Aged 18-25 Years of Age

Nazia Ali¹, Vrinda Ramnani², Ona P Desai³

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Occupational Therapy, ²BOT Intern Student, Department of Occupational Therapy, ³Former Head and Dean, Department of Rehabilitation Sciences, SNSAH, Jamia Hamdard, New Delhi, India.

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Abstract

In the current scenario that we live in, the bitter truth is that we define beauty by what is on the outside and visible to the naked eye. The body image of a person plays such a huge role in one's life that we constantly strive to achieve the perfect body. This has led to various mental, behavioural and emotional issues. Unfortunately people have even lowered their self-esteem. Body image and self-esteem have a great impact on the quality of life and well-being of every individual. So the research aims to establish a relationship between body image and self-esteem among adolescents and young adults.

The data was collected using Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale, Body Shape Questionnaire and Body Mass Index and it was analysed using correlation test. The results show that there exists correlation between body image and self-esteem adolescents and young adults. The study helped occupational therapists plan an intervention without stigma or judgment.

Keywords: Adolescents; Body Image; Self Esteem; Young Adults; Occupational Therapy.

Introduction

We exist in a world today where everything can be faked or fixed stomachs can be tightened, filters are used and all because that's what we're told to which is to change ourselves to be beautiful. Body image is the thoughts, feelings and perceptions of a person about the aesthetic or sexual attraction of

their own body. Body image can be negative ("body negative") or positive ("body positive"). People with negative body images may feel uncomfortable or embarrassed, and they may find other people more attractive.¹

Many teenagers have questions and concerns about their bodies. They continuously think about

Corresponding Author: Nazia Ali, Assistant Professor, Department of Occupational Therapy, SNSAH, Jamia Hamdard, Hamdard Nagar, New Delhi, India.

Mobile: 09818911486

E-Mail: alinazia786@gmail.com

their appearance which seems in a constant state of change during adolescence. Everyone has an "image" of their body and appearance and how it fits in what they consider normal, acceptable, or attractive. For adolescents, body image is a part of their self-image. They are very much sensitive and responsive regarding criticism about their body image which they find irritating and they perceive negatively things like comments and taunts.² Many of them begin to lose self-esteem or confidence if they get unfavorable or bad comments about their appearance, physical abilities, social looks, ethnic features and changes in their body that are linked with puberty. To focus equally on all aspects of their lives, they need to give equal importance to other major factors such as mental aptitude, their personalities and inner strengths, artistic and musical talents etc. that also contribute significantly in the making of the overall self-image.³

An era in which social media occupies a very important place and is used frequently in our daily lives. People of different ages and genders will be affected emotionally and psychologically by the ideal appearance and body size / shape set by the society in which they live. Cash and Smolak point out that the concern with body is a common characteristic of both sexes. Body image has different aspects in our life as well like, the way you perceive your body is not always an accurate representation of how you actually appear. For example, a person may believe they are overweight when, in fact, they are underweight. How a person sees themselves is there **Perceptual body image**. There are aspects of a person's appearance that they may enjoy or detest. Your feelings about your body, particularly the level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction you feel about your appearance, weight, shape, and body parts, are your **Affective body image**. Some people think that if they are thinner, they will feel better about themselves. Others think that if they gain muscle, they will look better. The way you think about your body is your **Cognitive body image**. When a person is dissatisfied with their appearance, they can take destructive measures, such as excessive exercise or eating disorders, as a means of changing their appearance. Some people may isolate themselves because they feel bad for their appearance. The behaviour you

engage in as a result of your body image includes your **Behavioural body image**.⁴

The level of confidence also known as self-esteem is determined by how much a person believes in his/her own worth and also by his/her perception of the degree of respect shown to him/her by others. Self-esteem is essential since liking oneself can influence one's emotional wellness and how one may act in a particular situation.²

Environmental influences play an important role in how people view and feel about their bodies. A person's family, friends, acquaintances, teachers, and the media all have an impact on how people look and feel about themselves and their physical appearance. In particular, when an individual is in an appearance-oriented environment or received negative comments about their appearance, such as being teased, they have an increased risk of dissatisfaction with their appearance which further also affect their self-esteem and how they perceive other things. People of all ages are attacked by images through media such as television, magazines, the Internet and advertising. These images are often unrealistic, difficult to achieve, and are highly stylized, upholding the ideals of beauty and appearance for the men and women in our society.⁵ Similarly Self-esteem of a person is influenced by factors such as body image, body weight, academic performance, and sporting ability and participation. In particular, heavier body weight has been found to predict lower self-esteem in people and one of the major factors for affecting self-esteem. The term self-esteem is usually used to describe a person's overall subjective sense of personal worth or value. In other words, self-esteem may be defined as how much you appreciate and like yourself regardless of the circumstances.⁶ Your self-esteem affects your decision-making process, your relationships, your emotional health, and your overall well-being. It also influence motivation, a person with a healthy and positive outlook may understand their potential and feel motivated to take on new challenges. People with low self-esteem tend to feel less confident in their abilities and question their decision-making process. They don't believe they can reach their goals, so they may not feel the motivation to try something new. Those with low self-esteem may have issues with relationships and

expressing their needs. They may also experience low levels of confidence and feel unlovable and unworthy.⁷ Many researchers have written about the dynamics involved in the development of self-esteem. Maslow suggested that individuals need both appreciation from other people and inner self-respect to build esteem. These both needs must be fulfilled for an individual to grow as a person and reach self-actualization. Self-esteem and body image are two of the most profound feeling, thought and behaviour of adolescent's. Comparing one's own body to another's cannot be satisfied because it cannot be measured. The social media craze and the use of Photoshop leads people to believe that there is a standard of beauty. However, this is usually not realistic. If it's not real, that's also unattainable. Nevertheless, most people suffer from low self-esteem. On the other hand if we see people who love their bodies regardless of the differences are more likely to be confident and happy with their lives. A positive body image involves being comfortable in appearance, understanding that appearance has nothing to do with your ability or worth to eat healthy to meet your body's needs (9). When you have an active and healthy body image, you feel more capable and energetic. You maintain realistic expectations, respect yourself, and as a result increase your self-esteem.

Aims and Objectives

- The aim of the present study is to find the relationship between perceived body image and self-esteem among adolescents and young adults.
- The objective was to determine correlation between body image and self-esteem with respect to body mass index.
- To find the gender difference in the perception of body image and self-esteem among adolescents and young adults.

Methodology

- **Study Design:** Survey
- **Sample Size:** 149 subjects
- **Source of Study:** Community
- **Population:** Indian Population
- **Sampling Method:** Convenience

- **Inclusion Criteria:** Any person within the age group 18-25 years dissatisfied with his or her body image in context of body mass.
- **Exclusion Criteria:**
 1. Adolescent diagnosed with any psychiatric condition.
 2. Adolescent having a medical condition of long-term nature (epilepsy, and others)
 3. Participants without internet access.
- **Withdrawal Criteria:**
 1. Adolescent not willing to participate.
 2. Adolescent who does not complete the protocol due to any reason.

Outcome Measures

1. **The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965)**, a widely used self-report instrument for evaluating individual self-esteem. The Rosenberg self-esteem scale, developed by the sociologist Morris Rosenberg, is a self-esteem measure widely used in social-science research. It uses a scale of 0-30 where a score less than 15 may indicate a problematic low self-esteem. The RSES is designed similar to the social-survey questionnaires. A 10-item scale that measures global self-worth by measuring both positive and negative feelings about the self. The scale is believed to be uni-dimensional. All items are answered using a 4-point Likert scale format ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

The scale has been designed specifically for brevity and ease of administration and has been reported to have high reliability (2week test-retest ± 85) and acceptable convergent validity, with correlations ranging from $r = \pm 56$ to $r = \pm 83$ between the RSES and similar measures (e.g. Coppersmith Self-Esteem Inventory: $r = \pm 59$). Discriminate validity is also considered substantial, with correlations of between $r = \pm 21$ and ± 53 with various self-stability measures and ratings of others (Silber & Tippett, 1965).

2. **Body Shape Questionnaire (BSQ-16B)**. It is a self-report measure of the body shape preoccupations typical of bulimia nervosa and anorexia nervosa. It was first reported

in: Cooper, P.J., M.J. Taylor, Z. Cooper & C.G. Fairburn (1986). The development and validation of the Body Shape Questionnaire. *International Journal of Eating Disorders* 6: 485-494.

The scoring of the short forms is based on the same principle: add up the scores on the items. Very roughly, you can convert a score on a 16 item version to what its equivalent is on the full BSQ by multiplying the score on the 16 item version by 34/16. By the same principle you can convert scores on any 8 item version to BSQ equivalent score by multiplying by 34/8. Bear in mind that this IS approximate: because different items will have different probabilities of being scored positively at the same level of body shape preoccupation a score on one item is not equivalent to a score on another item and a so such rescaling is always only a guide.

3. **Body Mass Index:** Body Mass Index (BMI) is the ratio of body weight to height in normal build people [BMI= weight (kg)/height(m); Keys, Fidanza, Karonen, Kimura, & Taylor, 1972]. Originally defined by Quetlet in 1869, BMI has become accepted as a highly convenient, valid, and reliable indicator of obesity. Garrow and Webster (1985) found that BMI provided a measure of fatness that corresponds highly with specialised laboratory methods, and provides an estimate of size that is more useful than percentage of fat. Normative ranges for Quetlets' Indices} BMI are defined as:

- (1) <15 – emaciated;
- (2) 15–19 – underweight;
- (3) 20–24 – normal
- (4) 25–29 – overweight; and
- (5) >29 – obese.

In consideration of the normal changes in body proportions that accompany age, in the present study, BMI was adjusted for adolescents by dividing the actual body mass by expected body mass (based upon

calculation of expected weight for age) then multiplied by 100 to derive a Body Mass (Coates, Boyce, Muller, Mearns, & Godfrey, 1980). Body mass percentile ranks, for the purpose of this paper, have been defined as:

- (1) Below 90% - Underweight;
- (2) 90%–110% - Normal;
- (3) 111%–120% - Overweight;
- (4) above 120% - Obese.

Participants

The study was carried out through an online survey among adolescents. The objectives of study were explained and people were requested to participate. A brief introduction about the objectives of the study was given to the subjects. Confidentiality was assured. A total of 149 subjects participated in the study. Information on age, class, marital status, place of origin, current place of stay, family type and income; and clinical details such as history of physical and psychiatric illness, menstrual history, family history of physical and psychiatric illness, details of family outlook, emphasis on physical appearance and family preference for health foods was obtained.

The participants in this study were a sample of convenience, predominantly recruited through personal and professional networks. The sample included 149 subjects. All the participants were Indian. All the participants were selected based on an inclusion criterion. The purpose of the study was described, Prior to data collection and consent was obtained. Participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality.

Procedure

The study was presented to the participants as an investigation of body image relationship with self-esteem. After receiving their informed consent, the participants were asked to complete an online form that included a questionnaire. All respondents completed the questionnaires on an anonymous and voluntary basis. It took 10 minutes to complete the entire questionnaire. Participants were given the option of receiving the results of their assessment.

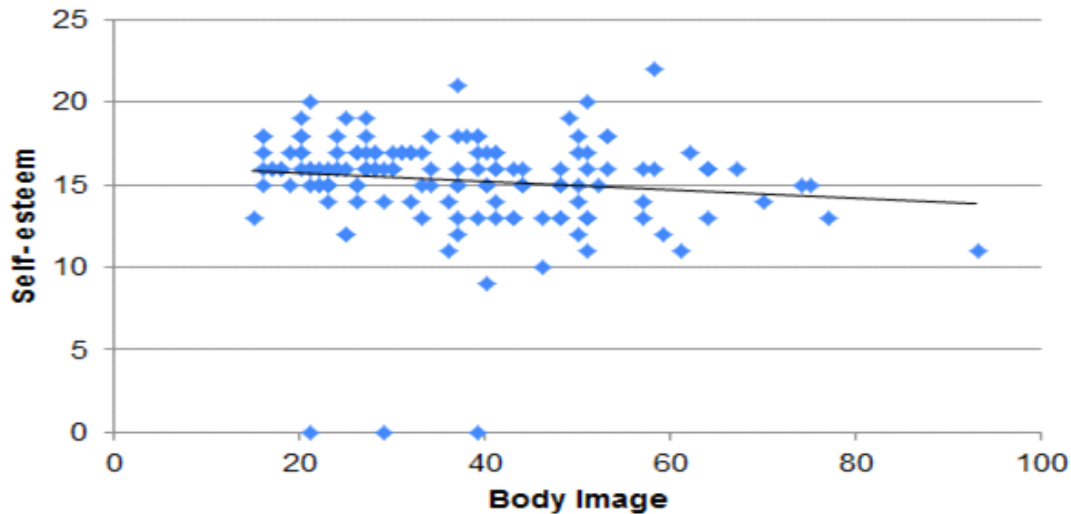
Data Analysis

1. Complete data was gathered in the form of a master chart made on Microsoft Excel 2010.
2. The statistical analysis was conducted using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 21 (SPSS v.21). Statistical significance at $p \leq 0.05$ was assumed.
3. Pearson's correlation was used to find the relationship between body image and self

esteem & Correlation between BMI and self-esteem.

4. Descriptive analysis included percentages, means and SD.

A total of 149 subjects participated in the study. To study the significance of the relationship between body image and self-esteem on the basis of different types of responses for male and female recipients.



Graph 1- Correlation between body image and self-esteem

Discussion

Body image and self-esteem are two major factors of an individual's personality that are linked together. Positive thoughts, perceptions and attitude towards body image contribute in making a positive personality.¹⁰ Self-perception depends on one's musings about their personality, their mentality and sentiments, and the way their body looks. On the contrary, confidence is based on how much one likes oneself, and how one perceives or values his/her individual character, qualities, aptitudes, and achievements. Youngsters who have low confidence may not generally feel certain about themselves or what they look like. Individuals with great confidence regularly have a constructive and certain disposition about their body and mind, can perceive their qualities and also maintain their individual esteem and worth.¹¹⁻¹³

The results show that there is a relationship between perceived body image and self-esteem among adolescents and young adults. Self-esteem grows up in adolescents and young adults through positive body image. If self-body image is negative and unfavorable then it prompts distress and dissatisfaction with oneself which leads to a low level of self-esteem.

The study states that female adolescents and young adults have a low level of confidence in their body image as compared to male adolescents and young adults. This shows that male adolescents and young adults have more familiarity with their body image.

The male adolescents have a higher level of self-esteem as compared to female adolescents. The younger adolescents have a higher state of confidence

in their body image as compared to older adolescents. As per findings of the research, the seventh grade girls faced more problems in the new environment as compared to boys and girls who remained in the same school. Moreover, girls with multiple problems including change of school and reaching puberty suffered with the lowest self-esteem.¹⁴⁻¹⁷

The older adolescent females have a higher self-esteem as compared to younger adolescent females. The girls who study magazines focused at grown women are more dissatisfied with their outlook. Most of these studies suggest that girls are more vulnerable than boys to physical changes; this vulnerability tends to turn in to a greater level of body and weight dissatisfaction which reflect slow self-esteem.¹⁸ Age is another factor that influences body satisfaction and self-esteem. Body image and self-esteem are two major factors of an individual's personality that are linked together. Positive thoughts, perceptions and attitude towards body image contribute in making a positive personality. Self-perception depends on one's musings about their personality, their mentality and sentiments, and the way their body looks.¹⁹⁻²²

Conclusion

The results are analyzed on the basis of the assumptions in previous studies that females report being more conscious about their weight as compared to males but the findings state that a significant impact of body image on self-esteem has been supported by the current study.

Results show that confidence in body image is higher in adolescent males as compared to adolescent females. Young adult females have a higher level of self-esteem. Educated adolescent males have a high level of confidence in their body image.

So, there is a relationship between perceived body image and self-esteem among adolescents and young adults.

Limitations

1. Sample was taken from only Delhi, which cannot be generalized to other settings.
2. Sample size for finding the relationship was small; therefore results could not be generalized to masses.

3. No Intervention was given.

Recommendations

1. Further studies with a larger sample size should be done.
2. Scales with more reliability can be used for better results.
3. Study was a survey. The design can be changed to pre-post experimental design or comparative so that results can be seen with distinction.
4. Further studies are needed to give intervention to these subjects.

Further Implications

Occupational therapy lifestyle intervention has been shown to lead to significant positive changes in mental health and social functioning, and decrease depressive symptoms leading to health care savings exceeding the cost of intervention. Occupational therapy intervention strategies (e.g., environmental modification, wellness-promoting activities) have been found to save money by improving health status and quality of life.

Occupational therapy's value lies in improving health and quality of life through facilitating participation and engagement in occupations and familiar activities of everyday life. Occupational therapy is client-centred, achieves positive outcomes, and is cost-effective.

Hence, the study has implications for health education of the adolescents and young adults. Adolescents and young adults with a distorted perception of body weight may set unrealistic goals and choose unhealthy behaviors to control their weight. As an **Occupational Therapist** we need to educate adolescents and young adults about their normal weight range and methods to maintain appropriate weight through proper diet and exercise. Occupational therapy helps them attain a realistic, positive perception of their weight in order to prevent depression and lowered self-esteem. Professionals should also encourage and support healthy eating patterns and physical activity while encouraging adolescents to recognize personal strengths not related to physique.

Conflict of Interest: The authors report no conflict of interest in this study.

Ethical Clearance: Verbal and written consent were taken from all participants.

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