

# Relationship between body image and self-esteem among college going girls

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■ **ABSTRACT :** The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between body image and self-esteem among college going girls using correlation design. A random sample of 250 students all of them belonging to Allahabad University completed a set of questionnaire of Rosenberg self-esteem questionnaire and body shape questionnaire result indicates that fashion or beauty magazines, social comparisons, overall appearance are important predictors of body image and self-esteem in adolescent college going girls and body image was confirmed to significantly related to self esteem which supported the hypothesis.

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**B**ody image refers to a person's perception of the aesthetics and sexual attractiveness of their own body. Human society has all times placed great value on beauty of the human body, but a person's perception of their own body may not correspond to society's standards. Female body shape or figure is the cumulative product of a woman's skeletal structure and the quantity and distribution of muscle and fat on the body. There have been wide differences on what should be considered an ideal or preferred body shape, both for attractiveness and for health reasons. Human beings and their cultures have perennially focused attention on the female body as a source of aesthetic pleasure, sexual attraction, fertility and reproduction. Perception of physical attractiveness contributes to generalized assumption based on those attractions, across cultures, what is beautiful is assumed to be good: attractive people

are assumed to be extroverts, popular and happy. This could lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy, as from a young age, attractive people receive more attention that helps them develop these characteristics. The main focus of this study centered on investigating the relationship between body image and self esteem. The effects of body image on self-esteem can be especially powerful during the teenage years. The present study contributes to the literature on body image and self-esteem. A person's body image is thought to be, in part, a product of their personal experiences, personality and various social and cultural forces. A person's sense of their own physical appearance, usually in relation to others or in relation to some cultural "ideal" can shape their body image. A person's perception of their appearance can be different from how other actually perceives them. Body image is closely related to self esteem. Body image

is defined an evaluative element of how a person values, supports, approves or disapproves him or herself (Frost and Mckelvie, 2005). Also, body image refers to the picture that individuals form of their bodies in their minds. A person's body image is influenced by their beliefs and attitudes. One's body image does not remain the same, but changes in response to lifestyle events (Women's Health, 2007). According to Davidson and McCabe (2006), a poor body image may hamper adolescents' development of interpersonal skills and positive relations with other boys and girls"

Ricciadelli and McCabe (2001) addressed that there is a relationship between body image and psychological functioning during adolescence they found a strong association between body image concerns and low self-esteem among adolescent girls, which has led to constructions of body image as an important aspect of female self-esteem. Body image is the term that has come to be widely accepted as the internal representation of your own outer appearance your own unique perception of your body (Thompson *et al.*, 1999) this internal view of oneself is associated with feelings and thoughts and may modify one's behaviour in certain situations. In some cases the feelings that result from reflecting on one's appearance may be positive; in other cases they may be so negative that they lead to depression or other behavioural disturbances.

Body image, the picture of the body that is formed in one's mind, is a plastic, constantly changing concept, continuously modified by bodily growth, trauma, or decline, and significantly influenced by the ever changing interaction with the social environment (Sugar, 1993) according to Sugar (1993), adolescent females have a fairly intact, integrated sense of the body as separate from others, a sense of gender and a sense of owing the body, as well as a relatively positive attitude towards the body (Sugar, 1993). 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. The research findings of Alexander-mott and Lumsden (1994); Bruch (1973); and Garfinkel and Garner (1982) support a theoretical model, which conceptualizes body image as a multidimensional and multifaceted construct. This conception was confirmed by recent research findings (Sands, 2000; Thompson *et al.*, 1999; Usmani and

Daniluk, 1997) and supports the perspective that body image is a complex concept involving internal-biological and psychological factors and external social factors (Fisher, 1986; Geller *et al.*, 1998 and Peterson *et al.*, 1984) evidence has indicated that a combination of perceptual and attitudinal/affective measures of body image proved to be better predictors of body image disturbance, drive for thinness, and disordered eating than either of them alone (Sands, 2000). Body image refers to the picture that individual's form of their bodies in their minds. A person's body image is influenced by their beliefs and attitudes. One's body image does not remain the same, but changes in response to lifestyle events (Women's Health, 2007). According to Davidson and McCabe (2006), a poor body image may hamper adolescents' development of interpersonal skills and positive relations with other boys and girls". Body image is the mental image we hold of our bodies (A. Faloon). It encompasses both how we see ourselves (perceptual) and how we feel about what we see (affective). Body image is a multidimensional construct, that involves internal biological and psychological factor as well as external cultural and social factors (Cash and Pruzinsky, 1990 and Nidhi *et al.*, 2015). Stice and Shaw (1994) observed that college women who were exposed to attractive image from magazines become less confident, more depressed, more ashamed, and more dissatisfied with their bodies than those who were not exposed to the images, therefore, college women who are frequently exposed to media images may be less satisfied with their bodies and physical appearance.

### **Self-esteem :**

Another variable that is of interest to the present study is self-esteem many early theories suggested that self-esteem is a basic human need or motivation. American psychologist Abraham Maslow, for example, included self-esteem in his hierarchy of need. He described two different forms of esteem; the need for self-respect, or inner self-esteem (Maslow, 1987). Respect from others entails recognition, acceptance, status, and appreciation and was believed to be more fragile and easily lost than inner self-esteem.

Self-esteem is the evaluate aspect of the self-concept that corresponds to an overall view of the self as worthy or unworthy (Baumeister, 1998). This is embodied in Coopersmith (1967) classic definition of self esteem :

“The evaluation which the individual makes and customarily maintains with regard to himself: it expresses an attitude of approval and indicates the extent to which an individual believes himself to be capable, significant, successful and worthy. In short, self-esteem is a personal judgment of the worthiness that is expressed in the attitudes the individual holds towards himself.”

Thus, self-esteem is an attitude about the self and is related to personal beliefs about skills; abilities, social relationships, and future outcomes.

Many of the most popular theories of self-esteem are based on Cooley (1902) notion of the looking glass self, in which self appraisals are viewed as inseparable from social milieu. Mead (1934) symbolic interactionism outlined a process by which people internalize ideas and attitudes expressed by significant figures in their lives. In effect, individuals come to respond to themselves in a manner consistent with the ways of those around him. Low self esteem is likely to result when key figures reject, ignore, demean, or devalue the person. subsequent thinking by Coopersmith (1967) and Rosenberg (1965) as well as most contemporary self-esteem research, is well in accord with the basic ideas of symbolic interactionism. According to this perspective, it is important to assess how people perceive themselves to be viewed by significant others, such as friends, classmates, family members, and so on. According to Maslow, without the fulfillment of the self-esteem need, individuals will be drawn to seek it and unable to grow and obtain self- actualization. Self-esteem is so intrinsically linked to thoughts about one’s body that physical appearance has consistently been found to be the number one predictor of self-esteem at many ages (Ata *et al.*, 2006). According to Rosenberg (1965) self-esteem is defined as a positive or negative attitude toward the self. Another definition of body image is evaluating one’s own body subjectively through linked feelings and attitudes (Duncan *et al.*, 2002); Frost and Mckelvie (2005); define self-esteem as the level of global regard one has for the self. Self-esteem does contribute to poorer body image and eating disorder symptoms (Green and Pritchard, 2003). Self-esteem is a measure of how one feels about one’s self-esteem can also help prevent the negative effects of the media influence, Low self-esteem on the other hand can cause one to be more susceptible to media images. Research has shown that low levels of self-esteem in both men and women are predictive of

more weight concern compared to those who have high levels of self-esteem (Hatoum and Belle, 2004; Posovac and Posovac, 2002) one variable sometimes affected by exposure to media images is self-esteem (Martin and Kennedy, 1993) self-esteem is a critical psychological factor that is closely related to mental and physical health social behaviours (Mann *et al.*, 2004) and Coopersmith (1967) defined self-esteem as either positive or negative self-assessment. High self-esteem is related to better health, positive social behaviour, success is associated with risky health behaviours and social problems such as depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and suicidal tendencies (Mann *et al.*, 2004) one of a broad range critical factors that determine self-esteem is physical attractiveness, an attribute considered particularly important by adolescents. High self-esteem is shown in numerous research studies to protect against body dissatisfaction (Tiggemann and Williamson, 2000). In addition, as compared to women who were satisfied with their body size and shape, female college students who were dissatisfied had lower self-esteem (Geller *et al.*, 2002). Both low self-esteem and body dissatisfaction early in life have been found to predict a range of adverse health outcomes later in life, including the use of unhealthy weight-control behaviours, other eating-disorder behaviours, general psychological distress, and a variety of other negative outcomes (Paxton *et al.*, 2006).

### **Adolescence :**

Adolescence and puberty bring a variety of physical, social and emotional changes. Furthermore, there is evidence that the body changes that occur during puberty for females can be more of a struggle than for boys (Davidson and McCabe, 2006). Along with the physical, emotional and social changes adolescents experience; they also undergo changes in relationships. Adolescence can be a confusing time, as peer and family relationships contribute to how teens perceive themselves. Feingold and Mazzella (2006) stated that concerns about the body have been documented as widespread among female populations, with adolescence considered an especially vulnerable period for disturbances in female body image. Physical changes also can be difficult because adolescents receive the most criticism regarding their physical appearance and the most efforts to change their appearance (Croll, 2005). Socialization encourages males to strive to become stronger and more developed, while

females are to make their bodies more beautiful (Croll, 2005). Social psychology has shown the impact of an adolescent girls appearance on how others perceive and interact with her, with unattractive individuals receiving negative evaluations from their peers and reduced social contact from their peers as well (Davidson and McCabe, 2006). During adolescence, girls may also experience some sort of emotional disturbance, which can lead them to believe they are unattractive. For instance, parents tend to become less positive and more critical regarding their children's appearance, eating and physical activity as they move into and through adolescence (Croll, 2005). Their peers can also make them become emotionally unstable, especially if they are going through puberty and the related physical changes. These changes are an increased hip and bone structure (Croll, 2005). From these physical changes due to puberty and adolescence, Dornbusch *et al.* (2002) found that a growing percentage of girls desired to become thinner as they progressed toward a pubertal status.

#### Purpose of the study :

The purpose of the study was to investigate whether a relationship exists between body image and self-esteem among adolescent girls.

#### ■ RESEARCH METHODS

250 female students of university of Allahabad participated in this study. These participants were selected through simple random sampling. Participants were 250 girls between the ages of 17 to 27 ( $M=22$ )  $SD=3.3$ . The self reported heights of respondents ranged from 4ft 10inch to 5ft 8inch with an average of 5ft 4inch the range of self reported weights was 40 to 75 kg with an average of 55.5kg. Based on these values body mass

index was calculated as the ratio of weight to height squared ( $\text{kg}/\text{m}^2$ ) for each participant. According to the BMI charts, lower than 20 is categorized as underweight from 20 to 25 is categorized as normal normal weight and higher than 25 is categorized as overweight (Fig. A and B). Body mass index for the respondents ranged from 16.3 to 29.16 ( $M=19.94$ )  $S.D.=3.49$  nearly 49 per cent of respondents were categorized normal, about 38 per cent were categorized underweight and 12 per cent were categorized overweight. Therefore, a majority were in the normal and under weight.

#### Instruments :

Two instruments were administered for the study. First was Rosenberg's self-esteem scale which consists of 10 items, with four choices of answers on the Likert point scale (1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=strongly disagree, 4=disagree) the tool has two factors. The first factor comprises six items related to positive self-esteem: the second factor, four items that refer to negative self-esteem. The higher the score on the scale, the higher the individuals level of self-esteem.

The second measure used was the Body Shape Questionnaire (BSQ) which contains 34 items about the participant's negative feelings about their own body shape, or body image dissatisfaction ranging from 1=never to 6=always, which aims to assess the frequency of concern or dissatisfaction that the young individual has with weight and physical appearance *i.e.*, body dissatisfaction. The higher score, the higher the dissatisfaction with body appearance. It is also possible to differentiate the assessed adolescents by the cut offs that classify four levels of body dissatisfaction: less than 80 points, free of body dissatisfaction: between 80 and 110, slight dissatisfaction: between 110 and 140, moderate

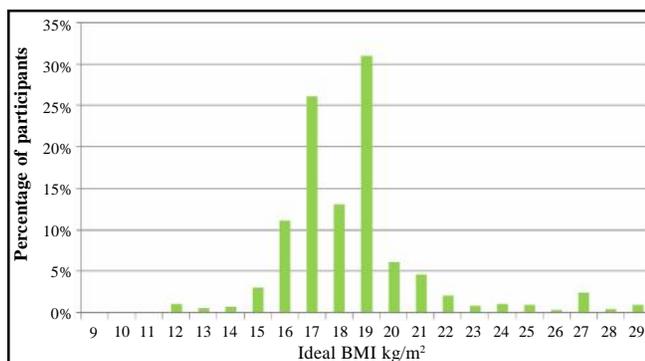


Fig. A : BMI chart

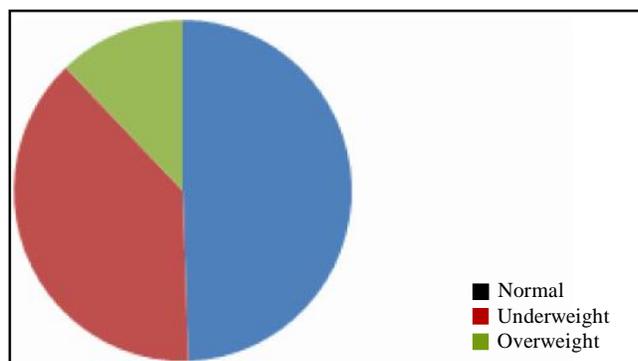


Fig. B : Body mass index

dissatisfaction: and scores above 140, severe dissatisfaction.

**Procedure :**

The two instruments were distributed and collected from the selected female students of university of Allahabad by random sampling 250 copies of the two Questionnaires were properly completed, scored and analyzed.

**Design / statistics :**

A co-relational design was applied to analyze the formulated hypothesis.

**RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The result indicated that 56.5 per cent of the

adolescent demonstrated body dissatisfaction, divided as follow: 22.6 per cent with mild body dissatisfaction, 21.3 per cent with moderate body dissatisfaction and the remaining 12.6 per cent with severe body dissatisfaction (Fig. 1) regarding self-esteem, participants self-esteem score ranging from 10 to 22 were considered high self-esteem scores ranging 23 to 25 were considered medium self-esteem and scores ranging from 26 to 40 were considered low self-esteem. The majority of participants were in the medium self-esteem range less than half of the samples close to one third of the participants were in the low self-esteem range and 36 per cent were in the low self-esteem range. The findings showed that 32.4 per cent of the adolescents had low self-esteem (RSES<26) (Fig. 2). The descriptive data for all variables in this study is described in Table 1 and 2.

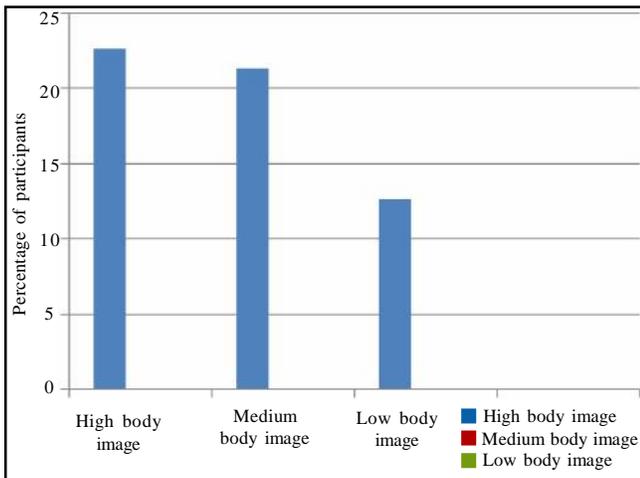


Fig. 1 : Body dissatisfaction score

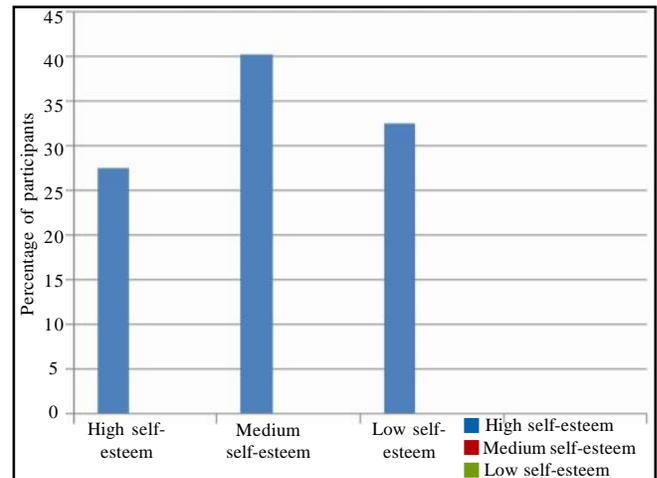


Fig. 2 : Self-esteem score

**Table 1 : Mean scores and standard deviation of body image and self-esteem**

Variables	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Age	250	18	27	21.5	1.83
BMI	250	3.49	16.2	19.94	3.49
Self esteem	250	14	32	26.4	4.3
Body image	250	34	188	69.4	34.9

**Table 2 : Co-relationship between body image and self-esteem**

Variables		Body image	Self esteem
Body image	Pearson	1	.341
	correlation	250	.000
Self esteem	Pearson	.341	1
	correlation	.000	250

A significant correlation of 0.39 was obtained at  $p < .01$  between body image and self-esteem which is above a criteria value of 0.30 (Pedhazur, 1997). This has confirmed the hypothesis that there will be a significant relationship between body image and self-esteem. This means that body image is inversely related with self-esteem based on negative correlation. It appears that low self-esteem significantly correlated with distorted body image.

The findings of this study indicated a prevalence of approximately 56.5 per cent of body dissatisfaction among female adolescents. This prevalence has increased in recent years, making it a public health problem. The media is mainly responsible for this fact, as it broadcasts images of skinny bodies associated with success, which tends to keep adolescents distant from reality and, in turn, generates feeling of dissatisfaction with weight, physical appearance, and body shape.

Body image contributes to our perception of self in the society; people have overall sense of body image which affects their emotions, feelings and self worth and recognition. In another study it was observed that the desire to lose weight is highly correlated with poor body image, with more women than men wanting to lose weight (Kashubeck *et al.*, 2005). This shows a sense of concern with body image which on the other hand affects ones sense of judgment and feeling about self. (Griffiths and McCabe, 2000) said that self-esteem was the most important predictor of body dissatisfaction, with females with low self-esteem experiencing more body dissatisfaction, with females with low self-esteem experiencing more body satisfaction than those with high self-esteem. It was also noted that the impact of society, parents, girlfriends and boyfriends improved the prediction of body dissatisfaction, low self-esteem and importance of appearance also, Davidson and McCabe (2006) concluded that their study showed evidence for the association between psychosocial difficulties and poor body image. The above studies revealed that women have more desire and concern about body image than men. In relation to the outcome of this investigation body image was found to be significantly related to self-esteem which basically supports previous investigation in this area. Young generation is getting obsessed with thinness, which has resulted with having the young suffering from disease due to malnourishment, the imports of which will be carried throughout their live.

Based on the research case study outcomes, the researcher suggests that further research should be conducted to examine the researcher recommends for counselors into the universities through the use of guest speakers on the importance of living a life with a healthy body image and positive self esteem, including speakers who had suffered with body image and self-esteem issues and how they overcame them. Having students hear guest speakers on positive or negative experiences will also help them gain insight on keeping a healthy body image and positive self-esteem.

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