



Body image, peer pressure and psychological well being among the young adults

Tanya Sapra¹, Sandhya Bhatt²

¹ Pursuing M.A. in Psychology, Psychology Department, University of Lucknow, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India

² Assistant Professor, Amity Institute of behavioural and Allied Sciences, Amity University, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India

Abstract

The main aim of the study was to understand the relationship between body image, peer pressure and psychological well-being among the young adults. For the study, sample of 120 students were selected from the undergraduate courses in Amity University, Lucknow. The sample included 60 boys and 60 girls. For assessment of psychological well-being, Psychological Well-Being Scale developed by Sisodia and Choudhary (2012) was used, to assess the body image, The Body Esteem Scale Revised, by Stephen Franzoi, has been used and for psychological well-being, Psychological Well-Being Scale developed by Sisodia and Choudhary (2012) was used. Results indicated positive correlation between psychological well-being and body esteem, and negative correlation was obtained between psychological well-being and peer pressure, and also negative correlation was found between peer pressure and body esteem. As for the gender differences, significant difference was obtained for peer pressure, and boys were found to be more affected by peer pressure, No gender difference was obtained for body esteem and psychological well-being.

Keywords: body image, psychological well-being, peer pressure

Introduction

The society and the culture in which the youth live today, gives lot of importance to the physical appearance of the individuals, who in turn feel compelled to follow the set beauty norms. This behaviour further gets strengthened when the people who are considered to be 'beautiful' and 'handsome' are rewarded in the form of getting more employment opportunities and better avenues. 'Thin is In' is the new norm in every household and because of this, family members put lot of pressure on their wards to remain thin and acquire the 'perfect' bodies. Once these youngsters reach college level, they are affected by the peer pressure. As this is the age where these people are obsessed by their looks and appearance, random discussions among the peers about the perfect figures and the models in the magazines and movies, lead to the development of satisfaction and dissatisfaction among the youngsters about their own bodies. The real damage begins when the youth start comparing themselves with the models shown on television and fashion magazines, and discover that they are not attractive, which in turn lowers their self-esteem and also adversely affects their psychological well-being.

Body Image

Body image refers to the feelings and perceptions of people about their own bodies. The perception of these feelings can be both positive or negative, it is totally dependent on the factors that are influencing the perception of that body image. If the situation is perceived positively it will form the healthy body image and if the event is perceived negatively then the poor body image will be formed.

Body image is affected by many factors including the influence of parents, peer groups and what they say about bodies and appearances, media influence, their own health conditions and bodily changes during puberty. The first source of influence for the adolescents is their own family members. According to Kostanski, 2009, environment plays a very important role in shaping one's perception about their own body image. The way the family, and other acquaintances react to them and their bodies, play a significant role in forming positive or negative body image. People who are teased or mocked at, by their family members, for the body weight or other bodily parameters, often develop dissatisfaction about their bodies.

Another very important factor that influences the body image is the Media and the way it portrays beauty. As per Holmqvist, 2008, lot of importance has been given to the physical attractiveness these days. Messages are being conveyed as to how one should look good, what all to avoid and so on. There has been a surge in the fashion industry that has led to the development of such a culture setting norms of ideal beauty. The trend further gets enhanced when people are rewarded for following the set beauty standards in the form of getting more employment opportunities, and also are perceived to be smarter and healthier. This is where the youth start having perception of their own bodies and form body image. The kind of perception they form about their bodies can lead to having high esteem or low esteem about their bodies.

Bodily changes during the puberty also affects the body image of the youngsters. According to Markey, 2005, the physical changes that happen during puberty contributes significantly to the body

dissatisfaction. Puberty has been viewed by many as a risk factor leading to the dissatisfaction with one's body. It can even lead to lowered self-esteem among the girls.

Peer Pressure

Peer pressure means that the person starts behaving in a particular way, dress up, or form opinion or attitude, so that he may be accepted as part of the group or peer group. There are times when the person doesn't feel comfortable or want to follow his peers, but he finds it very hard or difficult to deviate. This is known as peer pressure. Peer pressure, though has been viewed as mostly compelling someone in engaging behaviours that are unhealthy, but sometimes, it can be even positive.

The influence of peers has been found to be very strong, even stronger than the family members (Park, 2005). The transition from school to college is a very crucial time for the youngsters. It is during these years, they are more influenced by their peers and friends than the family members. Through their friends and peers, the youngsters generate idea what is being considered beautiful and what is more appreciated in the society, the more the friends talk about the beauty standards, the more is the pressure felt on the individuals. Taylor, 1998, observed that even the students at the elementary level were affected by their peer pressure. When the peers gave too much importance to the body weight and body image, students became more concerned about their weights.

Marlect, *et al.* did a study in 2003 on 4746 adolescents studying in class 7 to 12. Results indicated that 30% of adolescent girls and 24.7% of adolescent boys were teased by peers about their body weight. 28.7% of adolescent girls and 16.1% of adolescent boys were teased by family members. Teasing about body weight was found to be positively associated with low body dissatisfaction, lower self-esteem, higher depressive symptoms and even getting suicidal thoughts.

Psychological Well Being

Poor body image can lead to range of problems. It is believed that it the young girls who are mostly affected by the body image. However, the research shows that people get affected by their body image at all ages, and both men and women are equally affected. Poor body image can result in feelings of anxiety, self-disgust and even suicidal thoughts. A study done in U.K., on 4505 young adults found that 57% experienced feelings of anxiety because of their body image. 10% women admitted hurting themselves because of their body image. 15% reported having suicidal thoughts arising out of the poor body image. Study by Abamara Nnaemeka C, Agu Solomon on 400 female undergraduates in Nigeria, showed poor body image had lower level of self-esteem. Research suggest that "higher body dissatisfaction is associated with poorer quality of life, psychological distress and risk of unhealthy eating behaviours and eating disorders."

In trying to have 'perfect bodies', youngsters esp. women are also at the risk of developing serious eating disorders, like anorexia. According to research, 1 out of 100 American adolescents are starving themselves, 4 out of 100 indulge in binge eating and purge or use laxatives in order to maintain the 'normal' body weight. (2007). Jane and Luog (2005), did research on adolescents who were obese and reported having experienced

discrimination and stigmatization because of their bodies. They concluded that such practises adversely affects the psychological well-being of the adolescents.

Review of Literature

Study was done in North India on 555 young adult college women (Geeta Soohinda, Divyant Mishra, Harshvardhan Sampath, 2019). Results revealed that a large number of women had negative body image associated with BMI, low self-esteem, high on neuroticism. Subashini Ganesham, S L Ravishankarand Sudha Ramalingam did a study in 2018 in Tamil Nadu state of India. Results indicated that 77.6% of the girls had body image dissatisfaction. It was observed that factors like higher BMI, pressure from the society to be thin and depression were significantly associated with body image dissatisfaction. Deshmukh Vaishali R. & Aditi Kulkarni did a study on Indian adolescents, 2017, in which results revealed that the adolescents have major concerns regarding their body image.

Helen A. Hayden-Wade, Richard I. Stein, *et al.*, (2012) did their study in which they concluded that among the overweight children, appearance-related teasing was more prevalent, frequent, and upsetting, involved disparaging nicknames focusing more on weight rather than less stigmatized aspects of appearance, and more often perpetrated by peers in general rather than a specific peer. H. Delfabbro, Anthony H. Winefield, *et al.*, (2011) in their research concluded that girls were significantly more likely than boys to be dissatisfied with their weight and physical appearance, and these factors explained significantly more variation in self-esteem than in life satisfaction or other measures of psychological well-being.

Jane Wardle and Lucy Cooke, 2005, in their research reported poorer psychological well-being in treatment seekers when compared with population-based obese and normal weight controls. Melissa Lieberman, Lise Gauvin, *et al.*, (2001) did their study on adolescent girls and concluded that girls with high externalized self-perceptions, self-reported teasing, and attributions about the importance of weight and shape for popularity and dating were important predictors of both body esteem and eating behaviour. Study by Bill Thornton and Richard M. (1991) stated that both attractiveness and effectiveness were significantly related to the self-esteem of males and females.

Rationale

The study was done to know the correlation between body esteem, peer pressure and psychological wellbeing. This study is unique because as far as the researcher found these three variables were not correlated with each other before and it is the utmost case which can be found these days among young adulthood that their psychological wellbeing directly or indirectly, positively or negatively got affected by the peer pressure and the way they look at their body.

Peer pressure is one of the main reasons behind the body esteem. In the young adolescence, boys and girls face different bodily changes which either make them happy or make them sad, they compare their body looks with their peers and how those peers react to their body type which if is positive will increase the body esteem or vice versa. This is the very crucial age where wellbeing easily get affected by the way others behave with them and the ways other looks at them, this either increase their confidence

towards their body and they have positive psychologically wellbeing or vice versa.

Method

Objectives of the Study

- To study the correlation between Peer Pressure, Body Image and Psychological Well-being among the young adults.
- To investigate the gender difference in Peer Pressure, Body Esteem and Psychological Well-being of the young adults.

Sample

The study was conducted over 120 students, studying in the undergraduate courses in Amity University, Lucknow.

Measures

Peer Pressure: Peer Pressure Scale (PPS) developed by Kiran-Esen (2002), has been used. The Peer Pressure Scale consists of 34 items. It is a five-point Likert scale and uses the ratings of “never” (1 point), “infrequently” (2 points), “sometimes” (3 points), “frequently” (4 points), “always” (5 points). The lowest possible score is 34 and the highest is 170, with higher scores indicating high levels of peer pressure.

Body Image: The Body Esteem Scale Revised, by Stephen Franzoi, has been used. The Body-Esteem Scale – Revised is a 28-item gender-specific multidimensional measure of body esteem for women (sexual attractiveness, weight concern, Physical condition) and men (sexual attractiveness, upper body strength, physical condition). Respondents rate specific body parts and functions using a five-point Likert scale (“strong negative feelings” to “strong positive feelings”)

Psychological Well Being: Psychological Well-Being Scale developed by Sisodia and Choudhary (2012) was used to measure psychological well-being among the participants. It contains 50 items measuring five dimensions (subscales) of well-being i.e. Life satisfaction, Efficiency, Sociability, Mental health, and Interpersonal relations. Each subscale has 10 items, each item with the five-point response category ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Thus the scale provides scores on five dimensions/subscales, in addition to a score on the total psychological well-being. High score indicates high psychological well-being.

Results

Table 1 shows the correlation between the values of Body Esteem, Peer Pressure and Psychological Well Being of the Under Graduate.

Correlation Table

Table 1

| | Body Esteem Scale | Peer Pressure | Psychological Well Being |
|--------------------------|-------------------|---------------|--------------------------|
| Body Esteem Scale | 0 | | |
| Peer Pressure | -.268** | 0 | |
| Psychological Well Being | .794** | -.225* | 0 |

N= 120

P< 0.01

P< 0.05

Table 2: shows the Gender difference between the scores of Body Esteem of under Graduates.

| | Gender | N | Mean | S.D | t | s |
|-------------|--------|----|--------|--------|------|-----|
| Body Esteem | Boys | 60 | 132.93 | 26.792 | 1.27 | .34 |
| | Girls | 60 | 126.35 | 29.66 | | |

Table 3: shows the Gender Difference between the scores of Peer Pressure of under Graduates.

| | Gender | N | Mean | S.D. | t | s |
|---------------|--------|----|-------|-------|------|------|
| Peer Pressure | Girls | 60 | 50.98 | 26.52 | 2.48 | .005 |
| | Boys | 60 | 66.35 | 39.87 | | |

P<0.05

Table 4: shows the gender Difference between the scores of Psychological Well Being of under Graduate.

| | Gender | N | Mean | S.D. | t | s |
|-------------------------|--------|----|--------|-------|------|-----|
| Psychological Wellbeing | Boys | 60 | 211.83 | 34.39 | -.32 | .83 |
| | Girls | 60 | 213.88 | 35.77 | | |

Interpretation and Discussion

The aim of this study was to know the correlation between Body Image, Peer Pressure and Psychological Well Being. The result of correlation between Body Esteem, Peer Pressure and Psychological Well Being showed that there is a negative relationship of Body Image with Peer Pressure, which means that if peer pressure is greater, then the body image of any person will be lowered and vice versa. Peers are the important part in the life of the youngsters. Their thought processes, their behaviour is greatly influenced by the company they keep.

It can be observed from the table that there exists a positive correlation between psychological well-being and body image, which indicates that if Body image of the person increases the psychological well-being also enhances and vice versa. Feeling groovy about one’s body appearance has a positive effect on one’s psychological well-being or a good consciousness of psychological wellbeing directly relates to the positive feelings about the body appearance and functions of its parts.

Further from the table, it can be seen that there is a negative relationship between Peer Pressure and Psychological Well Being. Peers are the most important part of life. They preclude the state of loneliness and encourage in every field of life, influence health, happiness, Well-being and promote achievement in life. So they have a direct influence on one’s life. On the other hand, peer group also has a negative impact over, they may be involve in the risk behaviours. Those risk behaviours like smoking, drinking or bullying etc can lead to a negative impact over psychological well-being. Studies has shown that child adapt the same behaviour as their friends. Adapting same behaviour means increase in peer pressure as it can be against your will which would affect the psychological well-being. It can reduce the psychological well-being.

As for the gender differences are concerned, the results from the study shows that there is no significant gender difference in body image of the young adults. However, most of the previous researches reported that girls had lower body image in comparison to boys. Girls with poor body image mostly get bullied by their peers or they are not accepted by the society, people make fun of them in both cases if they are overweight or under weight. It was also seen in previous researches that girls

were not satisfied with their body due to which they had poor body esteem. According to this research there is no gender difference between body esteem, this can be due to various reasons like girls started accepting how they look, and stopped worrying about what other will think and stopped taking acceptance from others. The other reason can be that girls are also doing gym and exercise like boys do to gain perfect body.

The result of gender difference in peer pressure shows significant differences among the young adults. It says that males may face more peer pressure than girls. This may be due to many reasons, the first and the most common reason can be the gender role socialization which emphasizes that boys need to be tough and outgoing, stay mostly outdoors, and thus they are more influenced by their friend circle. The results further revealed that there was no gender difference in the psychological well-being among the young adults.

Conclusion

The study highlights some major concerns for the society, esp. for the youth, who have become more vulnerable than before and easy target. With the shift towards nuclear families and both the partners working, parents actually spend very little time with their children. This is one of the reasons, why the children start confiding in their friends and peers more. Gradually they start getting acceptance by the group members and also their need for affiliation gets fulfilled here. Slowly, they adopt the behaviours that are acceptable in the group, sometimes even if they don't want or like, they still follow the group, solely because they fear of being removed from the group. It is here only, when these children start forming opinion about different things, including opinion about their own appearances and bodies. Teasing by the friends or the peers about the weight, or height or other bodily parameters results in dissatisfaction about their bodies and having lowered body image. This in turn, adversely affects the psychological well-being of the youngsters, resulting in mental health problems like low self-esteem, anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts.

Under the prevailing circumstances, it becomes imperative that the parents must try to spend quality time with their children. Children have emotional needs more than anything else. All they are looking for is love and acceptance, which they keep searching outside. It is the responsibility of the parents to fulfil this need by providing emotional support to the children. This will also develop a sense of trust and security among the children, making them more resilient to face any challenge in life. Not only the parents, but the educational institutions where the child is spending majority of his time, should take initiative in not only providing academic knowledge to the students but also life skills training should be imparted to the students. Institutions should be more committed for the overall development of the students.

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