



## BODY IMAGE PERCEPTION AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS: A REVIEW

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### Abstract:

The purpose of this review article is to provide a thorough assessment of the current research on perceptions of body image among undergraduates and to identify the elements that influence it. The methodology involved gathering peer-reviewed and pre-printed research in English language ranging from 1985 to 2022 from various resources. According to the reviewed research, undergraduate students are dissatisfied with their bodies and have poor evaluations of their physical characteristics. Factors such as media, peers, cultural background, and family relationships play a significant role in shaping their body image perception. The study emphasises the need for additional research in this field while offering insights into prospective future research areas.

**Keywords:** body image perception, undergraduates, media, peers, cultural background, family relationships, dissatisfaction, physical characteristics

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**DOI:** 10.48047/ecb/2023.12.si5a.0177

## Body Image Perception among Undergraduate Students: A Review

Body image perception among students at colleges is a developing worldwide concern. Several research have been undertaken to identify the factors that influence body image perception, including media and peer influence, society, cultural heritage, close family members, and relationships. Gender also plays a role in body image perception, with women having a less favourable view about their bodies than males. While males have a more positive impression of their bodies than women, they are nevertheless prone to dissatisfaction with their bodies and may be at risk of developing an eating disorder. Furthermore, several research show that body image dissatisfaction impacts both men and women. Body image perception is also linked to eating habits, social support, perceived stressful events, and overall quality of life.

The purpose of the present review is to provide a thorough assessment of the existing literature regarding body image perception among undergraduates, as well as to identify the elements that influence it. In particular, we will focus on studies conducted in Ghana, the United Kingdom, Denmark, Iran, Italy, India and Egypt etc., as well as a cross-sectional study involving students from two universities in Egypt. By analyzing and synthesizing the findings of these studies, we aim to provide insights into the current state of knowledge on body image perception among university students and suggest potential areas for future research.

### Methodology

Peer reviewed and pre-printed research in English language ranging from 1985 to 2022 were gathered from resources such as Pubmed, Research Gate, Google Scholar etc. The primary data was collected regarding the Body Image perception among undergraduate students.

### Review of Literature:

According to Sylvester Tenkorang and Cosmos Osei Okyere's survey of university students in Ghana, respondents did not see themselves as having the perfect body form, were unsatisfied with their body size and form, and were displeased with their weight. In general, respondents had an unfavourable attitude towards their bodies. The survey also found that media and peer influences were the most important elements influencing students' body image perception. Other characteristics that were discovered included

society and cultural background, family members and relationships.

Ansari et al. (2010) investigated the body image opinions of university students in the United Kingdom and Denmark. A self-administered questionnaire was utilised in the study to collect data on body image perception, socio-demographic traits, and factors linked with body image perception. The findings revealed that women had a negative impression of their physical appearance and wished to be slimmer than men. However, more than a third of males considered themselves to be "too fat," demonstrating that males are similarly susceptible to body dissatisfaction as well as eating disorders. A higher quality of life was also associated with feeling "just right," whereas those who judged themselves to be "too obese" revealed an inferior standard of life.

Yahia et al. (2011) conducted a study with the purpose of gaining a basic understanding of the dieting approaches used by university students to obtain their target body weight and estimating the amount of body dissatisfaction in relation to weight status in a sample of 252 students. According to BSQ results, the majority of students (64% were not concerned, 19% were slightly concerned, 12% were highly concerned, and 5% were severely concerned) were unconcerned about their body image perception. Females accounted for 89% among the "very anxious" students, according to the BSQ results.

The current study (Alipour et al., 2015) aimed to analyse female university students' body image perception, as well as socio-demographic and dietary characteristics. The majority of people in the underweight (41.66%), normal weight (67.71%), and overweight (57.14%) BMI categories chose the thinnest figure as the desirable or ideal body image impression. Dissatisfaction with one's body image and distortion were identified in 51.63% and 64.13% of participants, respectively. Thinness was perceived as the ideal body image type by more female participants. People with devoid of distortion body image perception had a better nutritional state as compared to others.

Body image concern (BIC) was studied in this cross-sectional study of Egyptian male and female students. BIC was discovered in almost 40% of female students and 25.6% of men in the study, with no statistically significant difference among the sexes. BIC was substantially linked with BMI, feeling overweight, and depressive symptoms in

both sexes. However, a greater proportion of females have BIC, with about twice as many girls as boys having moderate/marked BIC. The study emphasises the need of students treating body and weight dissatisfaction, as well as depressed symptoms.

The study examined the body image beliefs of 400 Egyptian university students and discovered that women favoured smaller male body figures while males thought women liked smaller male bodies. More than half of those polled wanted to reduce weight, and only 30.75% were happy with their present weight. The majority of individuals expressed favourable concerns about their body image, and 91.5% reported having strong self-esteem. There was, however, a strong positive relationship between self-esteem and body image issues. As a whole, just 30.75% of those surveyed were content with their body image, with females preferring to be thinner. Body image dissatisfaction was noted by both genders. (“Body Image Perception and Self-Esteem among University Students in Cairo. (2019)”)

Few studies have been conducted to date on students' perceptions of their bodies. As a result, this study (Akbarbeglo et al., 2010) was done to evaluate the elements that influence students' perceptions of body image. The findings revealed that students were moderately concerned about their perceived body image (57.475.6). There were significant differences between medical and nonmedical student populations ( $p < 0.0001$ ), as well as married and unmarried students ( $p < 0.004$ ). Female students were more concerned with their body image ( $p < 0.02$ ). Because body dissatisfaction is linked to low self-esteem and an increased risk of depressive, anxiety, and obsessive-compulsive disorders, identifying individuals who have these concerns and the variables that contribute to body image issues can aid in the development of early preventive strategies.

According to K et al. (2016), roughly 48.1% of females were dissatisfied with the shape of their body and desired to get thinner, while 44.1% of males desired to grow heavier.

Adolescent body image perception is thought to be an essential element in weight management. Lee et al. (2019) assessed weight-control understanding, mindsets, and behaviours to compare weight-control behaviours with body-image views among Chinese high school students. Male and female adolescents both reported high levels of weight-control awareness, with girls scoring considerably higher than boys ( $P = 0.010$ ). However, just 50.9% of teens thought obesity was bad for their health.

Despite the fact that 44.4% of teenagers were content with their present weight, 62.8% planned to modify their weight. Furthermore, male teenagers identified their present size as their ideal body appearance whereas female adolescents chose a thinner physique. Male and female teenagers preferred a reduced body figure at a rate of 39.6% and 54.5%, respectively.

Shahi and Kohli (2019) conducted a cross-sectional study that found significant body image concerns among college students of varying BMI categories and gender. While females reported greater dissatisfaction than males with specific body areas, they were more satisfied with their overall appearance. Both genders rated their current body shape in line with their BMI, with males preferring a larger figure and females preferring a thinner body shape. Overall, male college students reported higher body image satisfaction than female students. Furthermore, underweight and overweight/obese college students were more dissatisfied with the size, shape, and appearance of various body areas compared to normal weight students. The study also discovered significant variations in body image views and attitudes for both genders across different BMI categories. According to the current study, women rate their appearance more favourably than men, although males are more content with the shape and size of various body parts than women.

Gualdi-Russo et al. (2022) recently did a study that attempted to analyse the differences in perception of body image and body ideals between males and females in order to discover potential discontentment and uncertainty regarding the ideal body image that is thought attractive to the opposite sex. The poll included 960 university students from Italy and was cross-sectional in nature.

Females, as expected, indicated greater unhappiness with their bodies than the male population, both in terms of their ideal and the physical appearance they judged to be appealing to the other sex. Despite the fact that both genders had misconceptions regarding the ideal physical form for the opposing gender, females were more in error.

Sharma et al. (2019) conducted research on body image perception, abnormal eating habits, and the effect of media sources on medical students in college in Delhi, India. According to the survey, 35.4% of students had distorted body image perceptions, and 21.1% had abnormal eating habits. Students were affected by 36.5% of media models and 40% of athletes, respectively. Male learners

were more inclined than female students to have disordered eating behaviours and to feel media pressure to obtain a perfect body image. Age and perceived body image had a strong association, with individuals over the age bracket of 20 having a greater rate of abnormal body image perception. Lôbo et al. (2020) did a study to determine how men and women subjectively evaluate their body image and their degree of satisfaction with their body shapes. The study included 100 college students of both genders, and their perceptions of body image and satisfaction were assessed using self-assessment and scale figure silhouettes. The findings revealed a substantial variation in subjective impression of body image among genders, particularly women having a larger gap between their real and perceived image. There were no gender disparities in body image satisfaction, with both men and women reporting significant levels of dissatisfaction. In particular, 46.2% of men desired to reduce their physique size, while 53.8% desired to expand it. 76.1% of women wanted to reduce their bodily proportions, while 23.9% wanted to expand them.

According to Peat et al. (2008), women have much greater degrees of body dissatisfaction that lasts their entire lifetimes, and they regularly report higher degrees of body dissatisfaction than men. Boutahar et al. (2019) conducted a questionnaire-based study on 246 university students in Morocco, which found that 16.7% of participants were underweight, while 11.4% were overweight or obese, with the latter being higher in girls than males. Additionally, 43.9% of individuals judged themselves to be underweight, while only 4.2% considered themselves to be overweight. The study also found that 69.8% of participants had body image dissatisfaction, and overweight/obese students desired to lose weight, with males wanting to gain weight. These results suggest that students underestimated their body weight and had a significant level of body image dissatisfaction.

Males who are dissatisfied with their bodies, according to McCabe and Ricciardelli (2004), might suffer from poor psychological adjustment, eating disorders, exercising addiction, steroid misuse, and other health difficulties. According to the current data, both male and female children had comparable degrees of body dissatisfaction, with the majority expressing high levels of body satisfaction. During adolescence, males are divided between wanting to reduce and gain weight, but research on the desire to enhance muscular size is scarce. As they become older, men's urge to lose weight increases.

According to McDonald and Thompson's (1992) study, highly physically active men in college were less likely than physically active female college students to have significant levels of body dissatisfaction.

Harmatz and colleagues (1985) investigated the body image concerns of underweight college men with BMIs less than 25. The findings revealed that these males had major issues with their body image, which hampered their social adjustment. In fact, their unfavourable body image faced them with much more obstacles than overweight women.

### Results and Discussion:

According to the studies analysed, university students have negative evaluations of their bodies and are unsatisfied with their body shape and weight. The most important factors influencing young people's body image perception are media and peer influences. Women have a less favourable view towards their bodies than males, and the desire to be slim is an important factor in women's body image perception and attitude towards their bodies. The study did discover, however, that men are as sensitive to the observed "issues" of body dissatisfaction, and so may be a probable risk group for the onset of an eating disorder. Both men and women are affected by body image dissatisfaction. Finally, a link was discovered between self-esteem and body image problems.

One limitation of the studies is that they were limited to university students, which may not be generalizable to other populations. While university students are an important population to study, it is important to examine body image perceptions in a wider range of populations, such as adolescents and middle-aged adults.

Another limitation of the studies is that they were conducted in specific countries, which may not be representative of other cultures. It is important to conduct research in different cultural contexts to identify cultural differences in body image perception. A third limitation is that the studies are cross-sectional, which means causality cannot be established. Longitudinal studies should be conducted to establish causality and identify changes in body image perception over time. Finally, the studies rely on self-reported data, which may not be accurate. Objective measures should be used to assess body image perception, such as measurements of body composition.

Future study should focus on discovering effective therapies to improve body dissatisfaction and negative body image perception, while taking cultural and societal aspects into account. It is

critical to apply the findings of this study to assist individuals in developing good body image beliefs, improving their mental health, and promoting general well-being.

### Conclusion:

According to the research examined, college students are dissatisfied with their bodies and have poor evaluations of their physical attractiveness. Several elements influence their body image perspective, including media, peers, cultural background, and family interactions. Women have a more negative attitude towards their bodies than males, and the desire to have a small shape is especially crucial to women's body image perception. Both genders are affected by body image dissatisfaction, and having a sense of being "just right" is associated with a better quality of life. Female participants were more inclined towards a thin body image, and those who had a healthy body image perception had better nutritional health. Body Mass Index (BMI), feeling overweight, and depressive symptoms were strongly linked to body image concerns for both genders. While the majority of individuals experienced favourable body image concerns, just a minority were satisfied with their bodies.

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