

Prevalence of Poor Body Image among Medical Students, It's Effect on Their Life and Self-Esteem and Impact of Educational Intervention on Their Perception

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Abstract:

Introduction: Body image is a multidimensional construct involving self-perception on size and body shape, surrounded by the sensations and immediate experiences, also involving a subjective component that refers to individual satisfaction with body size.

Aims/Objectives:

- To Assess the Body Image perception.
- To understand that a negative body image can lead to Self-Destructive Behaviours and Health/Psychological Problems.
- To highlight strategies for improving body image and self-esteem.

Methodology: The Interventional study was conducted from January 2023 - March 2023. The study was planned and conducted among undergraduate medical students of Subharti Medical College, Meerut.

Result: The student's participants reported that they were knowledgeable about poor image and body shaming practices.

Keywords: Body Image, Self-Esteem, Self-Destructive Behaviours and Health/Psychological Problems.

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Introduction

Body image is a multidimensional construct involving self-perception on size and body shape, surrounded by the sensations and immediate experiences, also involving a subjective component that refers to individual satisfaction with body size. Influenced by:

- Media, family and social environment may influence body image directly and indirectly. The interactions among these variables can promote unrealistic appearance and excessive comparisons with peers.
- Adolescents are most vulnerable to these influences because of their transition period, which is characterized by rapid growth and development as well as continuous changes in their bodies which is based on satisfaction with one's own body.

Body image is a person's perception of the aesthetics or sexual attractiveness of their own body. It involves how a person sees themselves, compared to the standards that have been set by society. Human society has at 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. [1]

The concept of body image is used in a number of disciplines, including psychology, medicine, psychiatry, psychoanalysis, philosophy, cultural and feminist studies; the media also often uses the term. Across these disciplines and media there is no consensus definition, but body image may be expressed as how people view themselves in the mirror, or in their minds. It incorporates the memories, experiences, assumption, and comparisons of one's own appearance, and overall attitudes towards one's height, shape, and weight. An individual's impression of their body also assumed to be ideals cultivated by various social and cultural ideals.

Body image can have a wide range of psychological effects and physical effects. Throughout history, it has been extremely difficult for people to live up to the standards of society and what they believe the ideal body is. Many factors

contribute to a person's body image; some these include: family dynamics, mental illness, biological predisposition and environmental causes for obesity or malnutrition, and cultural expectations (e.g., media and politics). People who are either underweight or overweight can have poor body image. However, when people are constantly told and shown the cosmetic appeal of weight loss and are warned about the risks of obesity, those who are normal or overweight on the BMI scale have higher risks of poor body image.

The issue surrounding body image can be examined through body negativity and through body positivity. (2)

Negative body image consists of disoriented view of one's shape; whereby one may often feel self-conscious or feel ashamed, and assume other are more attractive. Aside from having low self-esteem, sufferers typically fixate on altering their physical appearances. Lone-term behaviour could thus potentially lead to higher risks of eating disorders, isolation, and mental illnesses. Body size and shape misperception as well as being dissatisfied with their body size, exposure to idealized images of thin bodies as associated with overestimation of one's own body size. The nature of the interaction between body size and shape misperception and body dissatisfaction is vast.

Effects of a negative body image

- Emotional distress
- Low self-esteem
- Unhealthy dieting habits
- Anxiety
- Depression, social withdrawal or isolation
- Eating disorders (anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, binge eating disorder)
- Increase in drug use (i.e., steroids)

Positive body image on the other hand, is described as a clear true perception of one's figure. In addition to celebrating and appreciating the body, it also requires an understanding that an individual's appearance does not reflect their character or self-worth. A person with a positive body image has a true and clear perception of their body shape and appearance.

The person is happy about the way they look, and they accept and feel good about their body and their appearance, even if it does not match what the media, family or friends suggests is desirable. They are aware that how they look is not their personality. They are proud of the way they look and feel confident in their body. A healthy lifestyle, with a balanced diet and exercise, can contribute to a positive body image, part of having a positive body image is the ability to separate how we value ourselves from how we look. People who realize

that self-worth is not linked to appearance tend to feel good about how they look.[3]

Developing a positive body image, or helping someone else to do so, requires three key skills or characteristics:

1. Good self-esteem
2. A positive attitude.
3. Emotional awareness and self-control, sometimes called emotional stability. Body shaming," the act of humiliating someone for their size, size, body or appearance.

"We are our own worst critic" is often a phrase we use to describe when we, as individuals, are too hard on ourselves. For most people, it is a natural tendency to always be better, faster and best.

Body shaming the action or practice of expressing humiliation about another's individual's body shape or size; a form of bullying that can result in severe emotional trauma, especially at a young age. Body shaming is done by parents, siblings, friends, enemies and schoolmates and is often portrayed in the media.

Body-shaming manifests in many ways:

- 1) Criticizing your own appearance, through a judgment or a comparison to another person.
- 2) Criticizing another's appearance in front of them.
- 3) Criticizing another's appearance without their knowledge.[1]

No matter how these manifests, it often leads to comparison and shame and perpetuates the idea that people should be judged mainly for their physical features.

Faulty ways to enhance body-

- Faulty Dietary changes
- Clothing changes (tummy tucker, corsets and body shaper)
- Faulty food habits (junk food)
- Weight loss medication (steroids and pills)
- Excessive physical activity
- Cosmetic products misuse [4]

The present study was undertaken with the objective to find out the prevalence of poor body image among first year medical students and to use an intervention to improve the perception of body image.

Aims/Objectives:

- 1) To Assess the Body Image perception.
- 2) To understand that a negative body image can lead to Self-Destructive Behaviours and Health/Psychological Problems.
- 3) To highlight strategies for improving body image and self-esteem.

Materials and Methods

Design: The Interventional study was conducted from January 2023 - March 2023. The study was planned and conducted among undergraduate medical students of Subharti Medical College, Meerut.

Study Population: First year MBBS students of Subharti Medical College

Data Collection

The data was collected by providing a google form of Self-designed structured questionnaire. The study instrument used was Littleton's body image concern scale, Rosenberg self-esteem questionnaire. Objectified body consciousness scale (OBCS).

Result

Table 1:

Statements		Always	Often	Some-times	Rarely	Never	Paired- t-test
I am dissatisfied with some aspect of my appearance	Pre	5	17	38	27	13	t= -7.14
	Post	2	10	36	30	22	p <0.0001*
I spend a significant amount of time checking my appearance in mirror	Pre	7	24	33	17	19	t= -7.62
	Post	3	13	33	29	22	p <0.0001*
I feel others are speaking negatively about my appearance	Pre	8	15	30	33	14	t= -8.29
	Post	2	9	23	48	18	p <0.0001*
I am reluctant to engage in social activities when my appearance does not meet my satisfaction	Pre	7	19	25	26	23	t= -9
	Post	0	9	29	31	31	p <0.0001*
I feel there are certain aspects of my appearance that are unattractive	Pre	5	16	24	36	19	t= -11.47
	Post	0	4	19	43	34	p <0.0001*
I buy cosmetic products to improve my appearance	Pre	5	14	18	27	36	t= -6.36
	Post	2	6	16	38	38	p <0.0001*
I seek reassurance from others about my appearance	Pre	7	26	31	18	18	t= -7.95
	Post	4	15	30	26	25	p <0.0001*
I feel there are certain aspects of my appearance that I need to change	Pre	11	13	35	24	17	t= -6.82
	Post	4	11	30	36	19	p <0.0001*
I am ashamed of some part of my body	Pre	9	10	18	19	44	t= -7.80
	Post	1	7	14	28	50	p <0.0001*
I compare my appearance to that of fashion models and others	Pre	8	11	26	14	41	t= -10.78
	Post	1	8	13	23	55	p <0.0001*
I try to camouflage certain flaws in my body	Pre	9	10	26	24	31	t= -6.20
	Post	2	7	28	29	34	p <0.0001*
I examine flaws in my body	Pre	10	22	27	21	20	t= -9.76
	Post	1	8	34	34	23	p <0.0001*
I have bought clothing to hide certain aspects of my body	Pre	8	14	18	21	39	t= -8.93
	Post	2	3	20	24	51	p <0.0001*
I feel others are more physically attractive than me	Pre	14	18	39	15	14	t= -11.22
	Post	4	11	36	26	23	p <0.0001*
I have considered consulting some sort of medical expert regarding flaws in my appearance	Pre	6	5	11	13	65	t= -3.9
	Post	0	5	7	26	62	p =0.0002*
I have been embarrassed before leaving my house somewhere because of my appearance	Pre	8	8	17	19	48	t= -6.95
	Post	1	4	13	29	53	p <0.0001*
I fear that others will discover the flaws in my appearance	Pre	9	14	20	27	30	t= -8.35
	Post	3	4	23	30	40	p <0.0001*
I have missed social activities because of my appearance	Pre	8	8	13	19	52	t= -7.04
	Post	3	3	10	23	61	p <0.0001*
I have avoided looking at appearance in the mirror	Pre	7	8	20	20	45	t= -6.98
	Post	2	8	12	23	55	p <0.0001*

Table 2:

Questions/ Statements		Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
On the whole I am satisfied with myself and my body?	Pre	27	43	25	5
	Post	45	50	4	1
I certainly feel useless at times	Pre	6	27	51	16
	Post	2	17	47	34
I feel I am a person of worth, at least on a equal plane with others	Pre	25	60	12	3
	Post	42	48	6	4
All in all, I' am inclined to feel that I' am a failure	Pre	5	15	49	31
	Post	0	4	54	42
I take positive attitude towards myself	Pre	33	47	17	3
	Post	47	47	3	3
Do you support body shaming?	Pre	3	7	24	66
	Post	1	2	19	78

Discussion

This study investigated the effect of prevalence of poor body image among first year medical students and its effect on their life and self-esteem along with educational interventional study and the results shows that there was a drastic decrease in the level of concerns about the poor body image among the first-year medical students. Body image perception and its effects along with few aspects of body shaming practices which have been practiced knowingly and unknowingly, faulty ways people adopt to enhance their appearance which eventually harms the person physically and mentally both.

Many studies were read and discussed while the research topic was prepared and chosen. A few relevant studies in India and parts of world have been discussed and compared to the study which has been done here.

Another study, weight status and body image perceptions in adolescents: current perspectives by Dana K Voelker, Justin J Reel and Christy Greenleaf concluded adolescence is a critical period for body image development because of the various social, cultural, physical, and psychological changes occurring between the ages of 12 and 18 years. The relationship between weight status and body image is complex, such that additional variables must be considered when explaining this association, including internalization of body ideals, weight-related pressures and concerns, and a range of social influences (eg, social comparison, fat talk, and weight-related teasing and bullying) Consequences associated with having a negative body image for adolescents include physical activity avoidance, eating disorders, and dysfunctional exercise. Therefore, our study promotes that healthy body image should be regreated across all interventions aimed to address obesity, eating disorders. and other health-related concerns among adolescents. While our study focuses on educating and aware the young generation about a healthy body image and a healthy mind. Thus, promoting development of a

good body image and staying away from destructive criticism or bullying. Another study conducted, Body image issues affecting our adolescents? A cross-sectional study among college going adolescent girls Subhashini Ganesan, SL Ravishankar, Sudha Ramalingam Department of Community Medicine, PSGIMSR, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India: The study showed that 947 (77.6%) girls were dissatisfied with their body image. Body image dissatisfaction based on the calculated BMI of the participants. It shows that 58.3% of the participants of normal BMI also were dissatisfied with their appearance and wanted to reduce weight. In the underweight category, 23.3% were satisfied, and 7.4% wanted to reduce their weight further showing the tendency of the college students to have a thin appearance. Whereas Compared to the study conducted above, our study was done on a group of 100 Medical students, out of which 30% students were dissatisfied with their body image. In contrast to the study being discussed here, our study was done on both boys and girls. Also, the above study was conducted in adolescents which are much more susceptible to body image issues compared to ours, which was conducted on young adults (18 to 21 years) who are more self-aware.

A survey conducted, THEACARE Survey on Body Image: The survey was conducted on 550 women (all in the age group of 25-40), that included conversations with 7 women and personal narratives of 20 women living in major cities in India. The women surveyed consisted of survivors of abuse, women who have undergone hysterectomies, women with chronic illnesses like PCOS, Endometriosis.

Out of all the women, 30.15% thought that social media made them feel insecure about their body image. Though this survey involves adult women, in contrast to our study compared to this, 60% of the students on which our group conducted the study felt that social media had effect on how they feel about their body image. (17% always, 18%

often, 25% sometimes.) which shows everything that promotes a false body appearance or is more related to health propaganda instead of health promotion.

Conclusion: The student participants reported that they were knowledgeable about poor body image and body shaming practices. With a feeble idea of all aspects, students were concerned and showed a good response throughout the study with a good knowledge of aspects covered in our study.

Although many students had a positive outlook for body image and were more concerned about a better mental well-being and not indulging in body shaming practices. Students were aware of factors which contribute to a poor body image

which further contributes to body dissatisfaction.

In addition, it would be beneficial to educate students about body image issues which are prevalent which would eventually help them to develop a good self-perceived health status subsiding the misconceptions and misperception regarding body image.

Providing knowledge and making students aware about developing a confident image of themselves regardless of their color, shape, size and looks which could be a mean to educate the new generation and hence to be used for future learning.

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