

Slim Body Concept: Reasons Encouraging The Standards Of Slim Body Image And Its Impact On Women's Health, Confidence And Self-Esteem

Dr. Ayesha Gul¹, Dr. Shabana Akhtar², Ms. Farah Naseer³, Manzoor Ahmad⁴

¹Assistant Professor Social Work Department SBK Women's University Quetta.

²Assistant Professor, Pak Study Department SBK Women's University Quetta.

³Lecturer Sociology Department SBK Women's University Quetta.

⁴Assistant Professor, Cadet College Pishin.

Abstract:

Our world view is guided by the physical world, our knowledge, experiences and our perceptions and beliefs. Media is one of the powerful elements while shaping our world view in the age of globalization, through its presentations. Body image is an important part of one's life, as having a positive body image can lead to a happier and satisfied life while a negative body image can lead to a damaging behavior. Media's effects on people particularly women have caused many problems such as on health, which has been a recent topic for many scholars. The discussion which is dominating is either it has positive effect such as obesity or its cause or its negative effect such as thin ideal bodies preferable for women. This further has created many social, emotional, psychological and health issues. The problem of health either physical or mental has increased with the rapid globalization change. New images for body increases pressure for girls and women which causes health issues. These issues not only affect the health of girls and women but also their families' lives. This study is important in many ways especially in terms of disclosing those factors that influences women to adopt ideal body described in media. There are researches conducted in the topic however, there are very limited amount of researches conducted in Pakistan especially in Balochistan. This study is unique in its nature, because it reveals the health issues associated with negative body images.

Key Words: Body Image, Media, Globalization, Health Issues, Peer Influence, Self-esteem.

Introduction:

Body Image is defined as the person's own judgment of their appearance and beauty. These words were first used up by Paul Schilder, an Austrian neurologist and psychoanalyst. He mentioned

about the perception of body image in his book (Abbott and Barber, 2011). The understanding of an individual about their body image can differ from society's standard. However, the surrounding itself can affect a person's perception of their body image including socio-cultural influence, influence of media and peer appraisal. Body image comprises of how people sense about their own bodies and what people think their body should be or look like (Abbott and Barber, 2011).

The individual's understanding of their body image affects their emotions, acknowledgment, and self-esteem (Botta, 1999). Body image perception can differ among gender groups as well as people from various ethnicities will have different perception of their body image. Body dissatisfaction was found to be more common and felt more intensely in women, though men were also clearly affected by body dissatisfaction (Inelli and O'Dea, 2009)). Several health disorders, including eating disorders, are more common in female as compared to male. The latter one seems to be affected more by cultural norms and pressure of peer.

There are various causes that can be associated with negative body image perception that in return leads to certain changes in a person's performance and sometimes can be damaging.

The evaluation of one-self's body is subjected to many factors. Thus, many elements inspire and determine the process of evaluation of one's body. Cash regarded as authority on the subject, pronounces two elementary sets of significant factors in defining body image, these are historical inspirations and existing inspirations. Historical inspirations are "forces from the past that have shaped how one comes to view their appearance in the ways they do" (Festinger, 1954). Current inspirations are "experiences of everyday life that determine how one thinks, feels, and reacts to their looks". It is essential to discover each of these two classifications to comprehend individual body image advancement.

Similarly, (Festinger, 1954) deliberates two most important influences relevant in the advancement of body image. First, peers, parents, and supplementary loved ones are the major inspirations on the process in which one senses regarding their body. Second, the society irrespective of Western or Eastern societal culture has a great effect over the moods and insights about the body image. Regarding the impact of family and peers over the development of body image development is being discussed by (Botta, 1999) in these words, "Relations with other people are the main measures for judging oneself and are a fundamental aspect of everyday living".

From end to end associations with others, socialization regarding the sense of the body happens. Thus, from the very childhood the individual is in contact with family and a strong bond exist between family and child. With the growing age child came to contact with other society members as teacher and others. (Bourdieu & Pierre, 1986) Parents, family members and teachers are noble for a child. Their vocal and non-vocal behaviour inspired children and influenced child body image perception. (Asgeirsdottir, Ingolfssdottir & Sigfusdottir, 2012)

Peers include the subsequent level of communiqué regarding the body and prospects regarding the

body. Being frequently assessed or tormented concerning a certain feature of individual body in premature years can have long lasting consequences on the development of body image. Adolescent and puberty ages are particularly hard-hitting on body image because of the accordance of changes within the human body. “Feelings of social adequacy depend in part on how one thinks their appearance is perceived by their peers. Body image formation is very much the consequence of interpersonal relationships” (Howson, Alexandra, 2013).

Cultural habituation and values also fundamentally affects body image. In the book, Pipher (1995) in his book, “Hunger Pains” discusses the concept of culture in these words. He stated that, “Margaret Mead described an ideal culture as one in which there was a place for every human gift. It would allow its members to grow to their fullest potentials and would allow the culture the maximum use of its members' gifts. Nothing would be wasted” (Jones & Diane Carlson, 2002).

Thus, cultural values beside peer and family exert pressure on individual for adopting the ideals of the beauty regarding the body. These pressures influenced individual inspiration and also body image development process. Apart from these factors many other elements are influencing body image, of these media is one of the most important one. (Tsiantas & King, 2001)

Significance of the Study:

This study is important in many ways especially in terms of disclosing those factors that influences women to adopt ideal body described in media. There are researches conducted in the topic however, there are very limited number of researches conducted in Pakistan especially in Balochistan. This study is unique in its nature, because it reveals the health issues associated with negative body images.

It is considered important that obesity is hazardous to health. However, body which is shaped as slim and size zero are not the healthy body and it will cause deficiencies in female’s body. In order to have such body females usually apply different methods such as leaving healthy foods, weight reducing medicines and overly done exercises, which proves to be dangerous rather than beneficial.

Slim body is criteria for different social and economic gains. It also affects the self-esteem and self-confidence of women in our society. Beauty is associated with slim and composed body and it often cause depression and stress for those girls who cannot avail such body. This study will highlight those pressures.

Similarly, this study will specifically highlight the role of media which is the main source of producing such images. This study will deal with the facts and figures that exhibit the ration of women watching and following such media sources. Secondly it will explore in-depth the effect of such influences. This study will contribute in the domain of knowledge production and

awareness rising. It will also present recommendations for government as well as for general public.

Research Questions:

1. What are the factors promoting the ideals of slim body image?
2. What are the impacts/effects of slim body image women's confidence and self-esteem?

Research Methodology:

This part of the study deliberates the procedure of selecting simple and themes for the study, an explanation of the themes involved in the research, and the composition of the measuring instrument used in the study. This research study is qualitative in nature for this reason theoretical framework is developed with the help of well-known theories, which is already being discussed in the previous part of this study. At first instant this part of the study explains research design for this study.

Universe of the Research:

The locality or universe of this study is limited to the universities of the Quetta city. The female respondents of these main universities are being taken as the universe of the study. Three of the main public sector universities are selected in the universe of this research for the collection of data. These are University of Balochistan (UoB), Balochistan University of information technology and Management Sciences (BUIITMS) and Sardar Bahadur Khan Women's University (SBK).

Sample and Sampling size:

The purposive sampling is being used for selection of the true representation of the universe. Purposive sampling is the sampling tool, which is used in qualitative research for the selection of respondents from universe. In this sampling, researcher selects respondents, who are more related with the research topic and conveniently available.

The population of the study consists on the female students of three universities of Quetta. Three universities were taken as sample of the study' University of Baluchistan, S.B.K Women's University and BUIITMS. The main targeted population of this research study is the female of Baluchistan at university level at the age of 18 to 35, because in this time period female are most conscious about their body images.

Population of the Study:

The population of this research study is limited to the students of the above mentioned universities. 15 students are being investigated for these universities. From each university at least five students were interviewed to analyse the theoretical background of the subject and to compare theoretical aspects of the subject with the practical values within Balochistan. Apart from this two focal group discussion were conducted; one in the SBK Women University and other in University of Balochistan. During the group discussion in SBK, 11 participants presented their opinions

regarding the subject, which will be discussed in the coming part of this research. In group discussion in the university of Balochistan 9 female and 1 male participated in discussion. Male respondent was just asked for the arrangement of the discussion who is member of the teaching faculty of that university. The opinion of the male respondent is ignored but only his ideas were taken for granted which helps in encroachment of more information regarding the subject from the female respondents.

Impacts of Slim Body Image on Women's Confidence and Self-Esteem:

Under the heading discuss the statement that “the external influencing factors led for comparison and in the process of comparison women in Balochistan are involve in upward comparison, which produces negative impacts on self-esteem of women”. This statement in this stage of the study is subjected to verification through the collected information.

The focus group discussions verified the statement by asserting that, women are very sensitive to the social response, because of that they involve in unhealthy accomplishments of health. Due to the pressure of external or societal factors women remain concern regarding their look and weight. The respondents also presented the same views. For example, respondent asserted that:

“I always remain worry regarding my height and weight when I appeared in any gathering or passing through the people in my way”. She further added that “due to concern of weight I always try to avoid public gathering and even some times the special gatherings [marriages and other cultural tasks]”.

This shows that the self-esteem of women is highly affected by the influence of societal elements. The increase of the societal pressure decreases the level of self-confidence of women.

Furthermore, the self-esteem is highly affected by the societal influence. In this regard mostly the analysis of all the respondents presented negative self-esteem as when the respondents were asked regarding their BMIs and their level of self-presentations, some clear differences were found. For example, a respondent narrated that:

Because of my increased weight I am avoiding healthy foods, but when I was subjected to the scales of BMI that presented me BMI range in normal rang

The other respondent's self-evaluation was of the same which reflected the negative self-esteem level of the respondents.

Beside this the influence of the societal elements also produces negative impacts on the level of confidence. Two respondents narrated that because of their body language they feel anxiety in public. In this regard one more respondent asserted that:

“I cannot show my talent in public gatherings”.

She was gifted with a very nice sound but due to the low level of confidence she was avoiding to express her talent. In this direction she stated that,

“I most the time cannot attain the family and relative gatherings as they know that I am a good singer, it is just because of my look and weight”.

She upon cross questioning tolled that in such occasions her sound can attract people eyes and her increased weight may cast her negative comments.

The above collected information and discussion conforms that, the societal values are influencing women's body image in negative way. The negative impacts of the societal values include the level of confidence and self-esteem. Here the study concludes that the external influencing factors (i. e. media, peer, parents, family and culture) led for comparison and in the process of comparison women in Balochistan are involve in upward comparison, which produces negative impacts on self-esteem and level of confidence of women.

Impacts of Slim Body Image on Women's Health:

Eating Disorders:

There are numerous complications of society's importance on entrance related to obligating a negative body image. This obligation is related to health effects and led for different health problems. One of these affect is Eating Disorder that is reliably accompanying to a negative body image. Eating disorders includes anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, or compulsive overeating. “Body Dysmorphic Disorder” and clinical depression are also corresponding with the symptomology of a negative body image.

Anorexia Nervosa:

Anorexia nervosa is well-defined as when a person follows an extreme diet plan, and loss extreme level of weight which is dangerous of their health.

Although the slim body image includes the health impacts as the impacted woman perceived distinctions from other peers and societal members as weighty, interruption of the menstrual sequence, loss of hair, lowered body temperature and dry skin. However, it is subjected for verification through collected data from the respondents.

The respondents somehow presented the same situation as most of them were miss perceiving and miss calculating their body image. One respondent asserted that:

She is overweight and she is avoiding the energetic foods.

Similarly, another respondent asserted that:

“I am concern about my increasing weight. Although, I am avoiding healthy foods to become slim but it produces problems for me”.

Upon cross-questioning she further elaborates that:

“I am facing the problems of the usual women natural disorder [she was pointing for interruption of the menstrual sequence but she was not familiar with specific name], I am feeling weakness”.

As earlier stated that almost all the respondents misperceived their body image as overweight, here it was again that all of them were involved in weight loss or weight control practices. One respondent had very weak hairs upon the cross-questioning she told that:

“My hairs were very healthy in childhood but now these are becoming weaker although I am using different products for it”.

At this stage, the study verifies that slim body ideal produces negative impacts on women health which includes interruption of the menstrual sequence and loss of hair.

Bulimia Nervosa:

Bulimia nervosa is the frequent use of suffering behaviours, self-induced sickness, and cleansing use, excessive dieting, or fasting to prevent weight gain. Bulimia nervosa is categorized by body image distortion and extreme preference for thinness. This nervousness of weight improvement and determined extra apprehension with body image aggravates distress behaviours.

In this regard one respondent explained that:

“I like to be slimmer for this reason I am avoiding food and sometime fasting. At the same way I am using green tea for weight loss”.

Beside this a respondent stated that:

“I am very fat that is why I am using drugs for controlling weight”.

Similar was the approach of respondent asserting that:

“I think I am overweight and I want to be slim for this I exercise at least for one hour

on daily basis”.

Their repetition of self and perception with actions were the results of the impacts of slim body ideas, and they were victims of the unhealthy effects of slim body image. Thus the study verifies that the symptoms of Bulimia nervosa were also found amongst the women of Balochistan. The common impacts were nervousness of weight improvement and determined extra apprehension with body image aggravates distress behaviours.

Compulsive Overeating:

Compulsive overeating can be defined as “when an individual consumes more energy than is expended”. This person participates in compulsive, uncontrollable binge-eating, which is soon followed by repeated attempts at dieting in an effort to lose weight, due to body size dissatisfaction. A compulsive overeater recognizes that binge-eating is abnormal and experiences negative affect after binge-eating, which in turn precipitates further binge-eating.

Distorted Body Image:

Eating disorder is considered by having a fundamental distorted body image. The main three aspects work together in the formation of a distorted body image. Body-size distortion involves the perception of one's current body size.

The collected data also approves that the preference for thinness led for the misconception of the body size and weight, which in turn resulted body displeasure. A respondent stated that:

“I think I am overweight and I need to follow the tips for becoming slim”.

She was already slim this was the misperception of her which were influenced by the media and other societal factors regarding body image. When she was asked to select one of the figures from the chart which bestly presents her body size, she picked a much heavier body size. When she was asked to choose a shape which is liked by her and she liked to look like that. She pointed a figure which was much similar to her body size. This verifies that women’s body image is affected by the societal influence in negative way which increases the gap between the actual body size and the perceived body size.

Body Dysmorphic Disorder:

Body Dysmorphic Disorder is one of the examples of Dysmorphic Disorder. Body Dysmorphic Disorder is regarded as distinctly from eating disorders, but it correspondingly results from a fundamental negative body image. This disorder can be defined as “A disorder of imagined ugliness; a grossly distorted view of what one looks like”. Persons with this disorder have an obsessive preoccupation with their appearance. In authenticity, the target has a tremendously negative body image and is excessively self-conscious and embarrassed.

During the interview respondent stated that:

“Like other peers I am also feeling that my body size is obsessive but unlike my other friends I am using different methods to lose weight”.

Three respondents also presented the same views and further added that:

“We feel nervousness regarding our body size as it looks uglier”.

However, in actual they were looking normal and even smart and attractive. This was just because of the negative body image which was perceived under the influence of societal factors. Thus the study concludes that like women of the other parts of world, women of Balochistan are also suffering from the influence of the societal factors and their negative results regarding body image.

Depression a Psychological Impact:

This research also confirms that the negative body image caused depression in women in Balochistan.

We are concern regarding our future as with the current body size we might be rejected for the selection of jobs.

A respondent stated that:

“One of her friend was slim and she got married with a successful man and I am not much lucky like her as she does not possess a slim body... that makes me worry”.

Beside this the respondent asserted that:

“She don't like one of her family member as she got engaged with a boy with whom she herself wanted to marry”.

Upon further investigation she told that:

“She possesses very slim body that is why the boy likes her”.

Upon the question that what will be the possible reaction she replied that she will point her weaknesses in front of her husband. The above mentioned facts represent the presence of depression among women in Balochistan which is caused by the negative body image and its impacts on women

Conclusion:

This study concluded that there is increasing concern about the negative impact of ultra-slim models commonly used in advertising on women's body satisfaction. The body size of glamorous models is often more than 20% underweight. This widening gap between larger actual body sizes and the cultural obsession with an ultra-thin body size has been blamed for women's "normative" experience of body dissatisfaction, and it is this gap which is made salient to women every time they are exposed to thin ideals in the media. Media is regarded as the most influential element in shaping and influencing body image in today's world. In the early childhood media inspires indirectly, as the child regards his/her parents, family members or teachers and societal members as role model. These nominated people are directly affected by media in the case of body image. Media also effect body image directly, as the child grows to youngster. As it is the age of body conscious thus media presents role model for society and portrays it time and again. This direct contact with media influence individual's body image and body perceptions directly and most of the time produces negative impacts.

However, the study summarizes that women's body image is affected by peers, family, cultural values and media. The impacting factors producing negative body image and led to different body issues that includes; body disorder, eating disorder, psychological problems and negative self-esteem. For this reasons this research recommends following steps to be taken.

However, the study summarizes that women's body image is affected by peers, family, cultural values and media. The impacting factors producing negative body image and led to different body issues that includes; body disorder, eating disorder, psychological problems and negative self-esteem. For this reasons this research recommends following steps to be taken.

Recommendations:

Like other parts of the world, research studies must be conducted to further investigate the issue of negative body image and its associates in Balochistan.

Parental influence produces both positive and negative impacts on girl's body image. Parents must be guided regarding the positive side of the stronger body and its benefits, so that to produce positive impacts on girl's body image.

The cultural values in Balochistan are inspired by media and show convergence to the media's propagated slim body image. Thus is important to propagate positive impacts of the old existing stronger women body, so that to sustain the positivity of the culture regarding women's body image.

Media in Balochistan is required to project the prevailing body image of the rural areas of Balochistan, so that to provide space for the culture and to counter the ultra slim ideals of women's body image.

Peer's response toward women body look is under the influence of both cultural values and media, which produced negative impacts on girl's body image. Thus family, cultural values and media are required to help the children for acceptance of peers with stronger body.

Media is regarded as the most influential factor regarding body image as it shapes parental, family and peer's perceptions regarding body image, which ultimately shape cultural values of the society. Thus media is required to project stronger body image of women and counter the ultra-slim ideals of women's body image.

References:

1. Abbott, B. D., & Barber, B. L. (2011). Differences in functional and aesthetic body image between sedentary girls and girls involved in sports and physical activity: Does sport type make a difference? *Psychology of Sport & Exercise*, 12(3), 333-342.
2. Asgeirsdottir, B. B., Ingolfsdottir, G., & Sigfusdottir, I. D. (2012). Body image trends among Icelandic
3. Botta, R. A. (1999). Television images and adolescent girls' body image disturbance. *Journal of communication*, 49(2), 22-41.
4. Bourdieu, Pierre (1986). "The Forms of Capital". In John Richardson, Ed. *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. New York: Greenwood Press, pp. 241- 258.
5. Cinelli, R., & O'Dea, J. (2009). Body image and obesity among Australian adolescents from indigenous and Anglo-European backgrounds: implications for health promotion and obesity prevention among Aboriginal youth. *Health Education Research*, 24(6), 1059-1068.
6. Festinger, L. (1954). "A theory of social comparison processes". *Human Relations*, 2, 117-140.
7. Howson, Alexandra (2013) *The Body in Society: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
8. Jones, Diane Carlson (2002). "Social Comparison and Body Image: Attractiveness Comparisons to Models and Peers among Adolescent Girls and Boys". *Sex Roles*, Nov 2001, Vol. 45, Issue 9/10, 645-664.
9. Mills, J. S., Polivy, J., Herman, C. P., & Tiggemann, M. (2002). Effects of exposure to thin media images: Evidence of self-enhancement among restrained eaters. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 28(12), 1687-1699.
10. Tsiantas, G., & King, R. M. (2001). Similarities in body image in sisters: The role of sociocultural internalization and social comparison. *Eating Disorders*, 9(2), 141-158.