

Body Image Dissatisfaction and Self-Esteem among Adolescents: A Gender-Based Comparative and Correlational Study

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ABSTRACT

The psychological well-being of adolescents is largely dependent on their body image and self-esteem, which are often affected by social, cultural, and developmental factors. The present study aimed to assess and compare the levels of body image dissatisfaction and self-esteem among adolescent boys and girls, and to examine the relationship between body image dissatisfaction and self-esteem. A sample of 125 adolescents was selected using convenience sampling techniques. Socio-demographic data sheet, Body shape questionnaire (BSQ-34) and State self-esteem scale was used to assess body image dissatisfaction and self-esteem of the adolescents. Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, were used to analyse the levels of body image satisfaction and self-esteem, while inferential statistics such as independent samples *t*-test and Pearson's correlation were employed to examine gender differences and relationships between variables. The findings indicate a statistically significant difference between boys and girls in terms of body image dissatisfaction and self-esteem. Girls exhibited significantly higher body image dissatisfaction than boys. Conversely, boys reported significantly higher self-esteem compared to girls. Furthermore, a significant negative correlation was found, indicating that higher body dissatisfaction is associated with lower self-esteem. The study highlights the importance of promoting positive body image and healthy self-esteem during adolescence.

Keywords: Body Image Satisfaction, Self-Esteem, Adolescents, Gender Differences.

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a significant period of growth marked by rapid changes in one's physical, emotional, and psychological structure (Steinberg, 2014). People become more conscious of their physical appearance during this period, which has a big impact on their self-perception and general psychological health (Harter, 2012). Adolescent's self-esteem is greatly influenced by their body image, which has been defined as an individual's perception, thoughts, and feelings concerning their physical appearance (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002).

An individual's evaluation of their personal worth is known as self-esteem, and it is seen as an important indicator of mental health (Rosenberg, 1965). While poor self-esteem is linked to anxiety, sadness, and behavioral issues, adolescents with high self-esteem often show better emotional adjustment, academic achievement, and interactions with others (Orth & Robins, 2014).

Adolescent's concerns about their bodies have become more prevalent in today's culture due to increased media exposure, social pressure, and societal expectations (Groesz, Levine, & Murnen, 2002; Tiggemann, 2011). Particularly for females, unrealistic beauty standards often result in body dissatisfaction, which can have a negative effect on their self-esteem (Bearman, Martinez, Stice, & Presnell, 2006). Low self-esteem and poor psychological adjustment are significantly predicted by body image dissatisfaction, as demonstrated by several studies (Paxton et al., 2006).

In India, adolescent's problems with body image have significantly increased due to cultural shifts, urbanization, and media impact (Verma, Sharma, & Larson, 2002; Singh & Gadiraju, 2020). Adolescents who have a poor body image are more likely to experience low self-esteem and associated psychological problems, according to studies (Grover, Singh, & Bhalla, 2015; Bhanot & Jovanovic, 2005).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The concept of body image is multifaceted and includes emotional, cognitive, and perceptual components. It reflects how people experience and perceive their physical appearance. On the other hand, self-esteem is a person's total perception of their own value and worth.

Adolescence is a sensitive phase where pubertal changes and increased social comparison heighten body image issues. Research has indicated that poor self-evaluation and low self-esteem might result from body image dissatisfaction.

Study conducted by Shah et al. (2012) on 96 students of 17-19 years of age group found that girls are not satisfied with their body image and Indian adolescent girls are skipping their meal rather than doing physical exercise.

Earlier research conducted by Singh et al. (2015) among Indian adolescents revealed that body image perception, self-esteem, and body mass index are significantly associated. The findings highlighted that adolescents with negative body image tend to have lower self-esteem and poorer psychological outcomes.

Another Indian study by Deshmukh and Kulkarni (2017) found that adolescent's perception of body weight and shape is significantly related to their psychological well-being. The study concluded that body image plays an important role in shaping adolescent's attitudes and self-perception.

A study conducted by Lady Hardinge Medical College researchers (Gaddad et al., 2018) examined adolescents aged 13-18 years and found that body image, self-esteem, and lifestyle factors are significantly interrelated. The study indicated that body image concerns are prevalent among adolescents and are associated with psychological outcomes such as self-esteem.

In a study by Prabhu and D'Cunha (2018) on 309 adolescents, both males and females were found to be equally concerned about their appearance and body shape. Also, mental health and self-esteem scores were shown to have a positive correlation with body dissatisfaction indicating that those who were dissatisfied with their body were more likely to have lower self-esteem.

Similarly, a cross-sectional study by George et al. (2020) conducted in India found that body image dissatisfaction significantly influences self-esteem among adolescents. The study emphasized that adolescence is a crucial period where perceptions about one's body strongly affect self-worth.

AIM

The present study aimed to assess and compare the levels of body image dissatisfaction and self-esteem among adolescent boys and girls, and to examine the relationship between body image dissatisfaction and self-esteem.

OBJECTIVES

- To assess and compare the level of body image dissatisfaction among adolescent boys and girls.
- To assess and compare the level of self-esteem among adolescent boys and girls.
- To examine the relationship between body image dissatisfaction and self-esteem among adolescents.

HYPOTHESES

H₁: There would be a significant difference in body image dissatisfaction between adolescent boys and girls.

H₂: There would be a significant difference in self-esteem between adolescent boys and girls.

H₃: There would be a significant relationship between body image dissatisfaction and self-esteem among adolescents.

STUDY DESIGN

The present study adopted a descriptive, comparative, and correlational research design.

Sample

The study was conducted on a sample of 125 adolescents selected from schools. The sample included 65 boys and 60 girls, age range between 13-18 years. A convenience sampling method was used for the selection of participants.

TOOLS USED FOR THE STUDY

- **Socio-demographic Data Sheet**

The socio-demographic data sheet was developed to secure data relevant to a description of the sample. It includes various socio-demographic variables like age, gender, educational qualification, religion, domicile etc.

- **Body Shape Questionnaire (BSQ)**

This test was developed by Cooper et al. (1987). It is a self-report questionnaire that measures the concerns related to one's body shape and is based upon the notion that disturbed body image is a central feature of eating disorders and is widely used to assess body dissatisfaction and treatment of eating disorders. This scale consists of 34 items and all the items were answered using a 6-point Likert scale. The score ranges between 34-204 points. Less than 80 score indicates no concern with the shape, score between 80-110 indicates mild concern with the shape, score from 111 to 140 refer to moderate and more than 140 refer to marked concern with the body.

- **State Self-esteem Scale**

The state self-esteem scale (SSES) was developed by Heatherton & Polivy (1991). It measures a person’s self-esteem at a given point in time. This scale consists of 20 items and is widely used to assess self-esteem. Each item is scored on a 5-point scale. This scale is subdivided into 3 components of self-esteem covering performance, social, and appearance self-esteem.

Procedure

The present study was conducted in a classroom setting. Permission was obtained from school authorities prior to data collection. Participants They were informed and explained about the purpose of the study and assured of confidentiality. The questionnaires were administered and instructions were clearly explained. Participants were requested to respond honestly.

Statistical Analysis

The collected data were analysed with the help of a statistical package for social science-20 (SPSS-20). Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, were used to analyse the levels of body image satisfaction and self-esteem, while inferential statistics such as independent samples *t*-test and Pearson’s correlation were employed to examine gender differences and relationships between variables.

RESULT

Table 1: Demographic profile of the sample (n=125)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Boys	65	52.0%
	Girls	60	48.0%
Age Group	13-15 years	58	46.4%
	16-18 years	67	53.6%
Educational Level	Secondary (9-10)	58	46.4%
	Higher Secondary (11-12)	67	53.6%
Religion	Hindu	96	76.8%
	Sarna	20	16.0%
	Christian	04	3.2%
	Muslim	03	2.4%
	Sikh	02	1.6%
Domicile	Urban	70	56.0%
	Rural	55	44.0%

The socio-demographic profile of the participants provides an overview of the composition of the sample. The present study included 125 adolescents with a nearly equal distribution of boys (52%) and girls (48%). A slightly higher proportion belonged to the 16-18 years age group (53.6%) and higher secondary level (53.6%). Most participants were from the Hindu religion (76.8%), followed by Sarna (16%), with smaller representations from religions of Christian, Muslim and Sikhs. In terms of domicile, more adolescents were from urban areas (56%) than rural areas (44%). Overall, the sample shows a fairly balanced distribution across key variables, making it suitable for analysis.

Table 2: Showing Independent Samples t-test Comparing Boys and Girls on the Scale of Body Image Dissatisfaction (BSQ)

Subjects Variables	Boys	Girls	df	t-value	p-value
	Mean ± SD	Mean ± SD			
Body Shape Questionnaire-34	68.50±20.10	74.00±28.09	123	2.01	0.046*

*= P≤0.05

Table 2 presents the results of an independent samples t-test comparing boys and girls on Body Image Dissatisfaction (BSQ). The mean score of girls is higher than that of boys indicating that girls experience greater body image dissatisfaction. The obtained difference has been found to be significant at 0.05 level. This indicates a significant gender difference in body image dissatisfaction. Therefore, the proposed hypothesis (H₁) is accepted.

The findings suggest that female adolescents are more dissatisfied with their body image compared to males. This may be due to higher societal and cultural pressure on girls to achieve an ideal body shape, increased exposure to media ideals of thinness, and greater concern about physical appearance during adolescence. The present findings are supported by previous research indicating greater body image concerns among females. Studies by Bearman et al. (2006) and Singh and Singh (2014) show that girls and female college students are more vulnerable to body dissatisfaction and place greater emphasis on weight and appearance compared to males. Similarly, Indian studies by Mishra and Mukhopadhyay (2013) and Rajan and Balan (2017) highlight that adolescent girls experience higher body image concerns due to media influence, societal expectations, and urban lifestyle factors.

Table 3: Showing Independent Samples t-test Comparing Boys and Girls on the Scale of Self-esteem (SSES)

Subjects Variables	Boys	Girls	df	t-value	P-value
	Mean ± SD	Mean ± SD			
State Self-esteem Scale	72.40±17.25	66.82±18.70	123	-1.98	0.049*

*= P≤0.05

Table 3 presents the results of an independent samples t-test comparing boys and girls on Self-esteem (State Self-Esteem Scale - SSES). The mean score of boys is higher than that of girls indicating that boys have relatively higher self-esteem. The obtained difference has been found to be significant at 0.05 level. This indicates a significant difference between boys and girls in self-esteem. therefore, the proposed hypothesis (H₂) is accepted.

The findings suggest that boys possess higher self-esteem compared to girls. This difference may be attributed to sociocultural factors where boys are often encouraged to be more independent and confident, whereas girls may experience more societal pressure, self-evaluation, and appearance-related concerns, which can negatively affect their self-esteem. The present findings are supported by previous research indicating that girls tend to have lower self-esteem than boys. Studies such as Harter (2012) highlight that adolescent girls are more sensitive to social evaluation, which negatively impacts their self-esteem. Similarly, Indian studies have consistently reported higher self-esteem among males compared to females (Kaur & Rani, 2012; Kumar & Lal, 2014). Furthermore, factors such as societal expectations, restrictions, and body image concerns have been identified as key contributors to lower self-esteem among girls (Sharma & Wavare, 2013; Singh & Kaur, 2015).

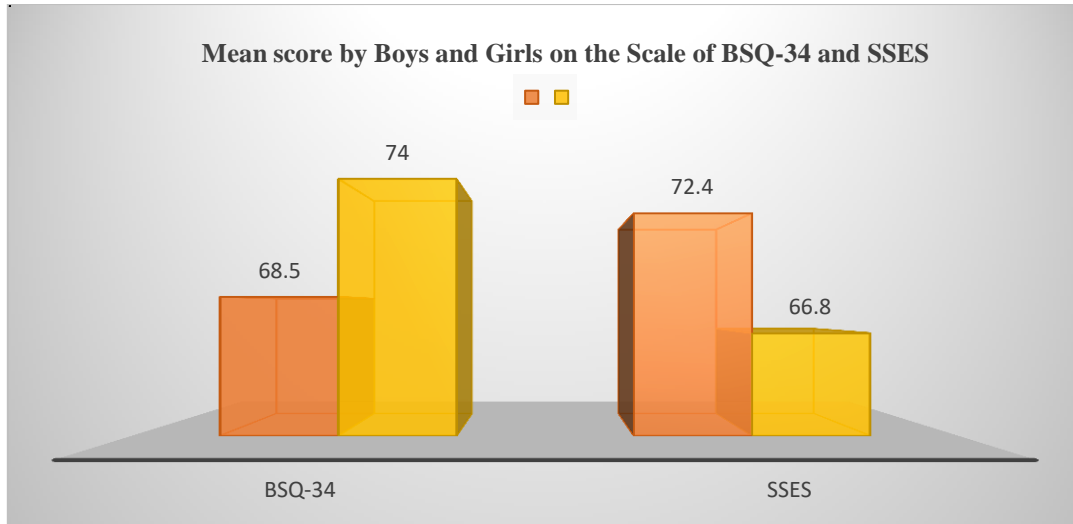


Figure 1: Showing the difference in mean score obtained by Boys and Girls on the Scale of BSQ-34 and SSES

Table 3: Correlation Between Body Image Dissatisfaction and Self-esteem of adolescents

Variable	Body Image Dissatisfaction	Self-Esteem
Body Image Dissatisfaction	1	-0.52**
Self-Esteem	-0.52**	1

**P ≤ 0.01

Table 3 shows the correlation between body image dissatisfaction and self-esteem among adolescents. The finding indicates that body image dissatisfaction is significantly negatively correlated with self-esteem. The findings reveal that as body image dissatisfaction increases, self-esteem decreases among adolescents. Therefore the proposed hypothesis (H₃) is accepted.

This relationship can be explained by the fact that adolescence is a critical period where physical appearance plays an important role in self-evaluation. Increased concern about body image, especially due to societal and media pressures, can negatively affect an individual's sense of self-worth. Previous studies consistently demonstrate a negative correlation between self-esteem and body image dissatisfaction. Adolescents who are more dissatisfied with their bodies typically have poorer self-esteem (Grogan, 2016). According to Indian research, body image issues considerably lower adolescents and young adult's self-esteem (Mishra & Mukhopadhyay, 2013; Kaur et al., 2008; Singh & Singh, 2014; Sharma & Wavare, 2013).



Figure 2: Scatter Plot Showing Relationship between Body Image Dissatisfaction and Self-Esteem

The scatter plot indicates a moderate negative correlation (r = -0.52) between body image dissatisfaction and self-esteem among participants.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the study confirms that gender plays a significant role in body image dissatisfaction and self-esteem, with girls showing higher dissatisfaction levels than boys whereas boys have higher self-esteem than girls. Also, there exists a significant gender difference in both variables. These findings highlight that body image dissatisfaction and self-esteem are interrelated, particularly among adolescent girls, making them more vulnerable to psychological distress. The results align with existing literature, reinforcing the impact of sociocultural and psychological factors on female body image. The findings have implications for educators, counsellors, and mental health professionals in designing interventions aimed at enhancing adolescents' psychological well-being.

Implication, Limitations and Future Direction of the Study

The study suggests the need for interventions to improve body image and self-esteem among adolescents, particularly girls. Schools, counsellors, and parents should provide supportive environments and help adolescents critically understand media influences. The study also recommends that future research should explore additional factors such as social media, peer pressure, and cultural differences. Due to limitations like a small, time-bound, and mixed sample, the findings cannot be widely generalized. Future studies should use a larger and more specific age-based sample, and include other relevant psychological variables beyond body image satisfaction and self-esteem.

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