

Gender difference regarding body image: a comparative study

Abstract

The objective of the present study was to determine gender difference in body dissatisfaction in married adults. The sample of the present research consisted of 200 married adults, 100 males and 100 females, selected from different organizations of Karachi following the purposive sampling technique. The age of the participants was from 22 years to 40 year (mean Age = 34.27; SD = 5.13) with the minimum of 2 years and maximum of 20 years of marriage. Their educational level was range from graduation and above. The entire sample belonged to middle socioeconomic status. After taking the consent from the participants, Multidimensional Body Self-Relations Questionnaire (MBSRQ) was administered. T-test was used to analyze the results. Significant gender differences were found on two variables of body image; fitness evaluation and body area satisfaction.

Keywords: body image, gender difference, married adult, MBSRQ

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Introduction

The concept of body image has been the centre of attention for the past few decades. Every person has certain kind of view about his/her physical appearance; some people consider themselves attractive, others consider themselves “unattractive”. This attitude towards one’s body is actually our body image; the perception, thinking and feelings about one’s body and also how other perceives them. Body image is a subjective perception of one’s body. Body image is world wide important factor in people’s life, 74.4% women and 46% men with normal weight reported that most of the time they thought about their physical appearance; focus on appearance most of the time is a risk factor for the increase in negative body image. Negative body image is discrepancy between current and ideal body. It does not only relate to weight or shape of body but also included facial features, skin color, muscles tone and height.^{1,2}

Women were the main subject matter regarding body-image studies in past researches but recent studies showed that men are equally affected by the ideal body-image set by society or culture but the men were more concerned about body-dissatisfaction in terms of feelings underweight rather than over-weight.^{1,3} Santos Silva et al.,⁴ studied prevalence and associated factors with negative body image among adults they concluded that women had more negative body image than men as men considered themselves thinner than ideal and women considered heavier than their ideal. Negative body image was also found significantly correlated with depression, health problems, personal relationships and marital satisfaction.

Mostly literature indicated that females placed more importance to appearance and shape of their body that explained by feminine theorists that female body is objectified in society like as an object to be looked at. Therefore women body image depend on others views about her. This is supported by socio-cultural theorists that societal expectation and ideal of beauty encourage females to be attractive and invested more on physical appearance that can lead to negative body

image and psychological distress.⁵ But other studies suggested that men are equally experienced socio-cultural pressure to achieve the muscular ideal due to this men are also at risk to developed negative body image and distress with body especially with their muscles size (chest, shoulders and stomach). Muscularity is considered as a sign of power so any man who fails to achieve ideal body can develop body image dissatisfaction.^{3,6}

Diedrichs et al.⁷ examined perception of men regarding their body image and comments of other’s about their body shape. Results indicated that 85% men became more dissatisfied and negatively affect and engaged in negative ways in order to obtain perfect body shape.

The literature indicated the significance of body dissatisfaction is an important issue, needs to be investigated. Most of the studies have been conducted on women or college samples and ignored the men. Because of lack of researches in Pakistan regarding these variables we cannot signify the risk and protective factors of body image that how men and women are different regarding body image dissatisfaction. This study will help to provide significant information about these variables in context of Pakistani culture.

Method

Participants

The sample of the present study was taken from Karachi, Pakistan. A total sample of 200 married adults was selected purposively for the study. It was divided into two groups of 100 males and 100 females. The age range of the target group was 22 to 40 years (mean age 34 years; SD=5.13) with minimum of 2 years and maximum of 20 years of marriage. Their education level was from graduation and above. Their socioeconomic status was estimated on the basis of Household expenditure and survey (2001); they all belonged to middle socioeconomic class.

Measures

Demographic Information Form: Demographic information form (Self developed) was included; the information related to the participant’s marital status, duration of marriage, age, income, occupation, gender, education, family structure, socioeconomic status, type of marriage (Love/Arrange), weight and height.

Multidimensional Body Self-Relations Questionnaire (MBSRQ): The Multidimensional Body Self-Relations Questionnaire (MBSRQ) is a 34-item self-report inventory that evaluates several components of one’s overall body-image. It is a validated questionnaire for the assessment of body image. The questionnaire has six sub-scales that assess an individual’s investment in appearance through grooming behavior and satisfaction with their appearance, health, illness, weight and fitness. The respondent is required to use Likert-type scale to indicate their level of agreement with the item where 1 (definitely disagree) to 5 (definitely agree). Cronbach alpha for the subscales are: Appearance evaluation and Appearance orientation; .88, Fitness evaluation; .77, Fitness orientation; .91, Body areas satisfaction; .77 and Subjective weight is .73.

Procedure

The study was conducted after seeking approval from Ethical Review Committee of Board of Advance Studies and Research (BASR), University of Karachi, Pakistan. At the initial stage researchers met the authorities of different organizations located in Karachi to collect the data. Official permission was taken and purpose procedure of the study was explained, confidentiality ensured and informed consent was taken from the participants. The subject first completed the Demographic Information then Multidimensional Body Self-Relations Questionnaire (MBSRQ) and responses were scored according to the producer given in manuals. At the end of they were thanked for their cooperation.

Statistical analysis

Data was analyzed on SPSS version 21. Descriptive statistics of frequencies, percentages and means were calculated for the demographic variables of age, gender and weight, height and family structure, duration and type of marriage, birth order, education and occupation. Further t-test was employed to see gender difference on the variable of body image.

Ethical consideration

Present studies meet the ethical standards of APA guideline, principle of confidentiality, informed consent; permission (from authorities, participants, family of participant if it was seemed necessary and publishers) and right to with drawl from the study were followed by the researchers.

Results

Descriptive statistics of frequencies and percentages, mean and standard deviation were calculated for the demographic variables of age, gender and weight, height and family structure, duration and type of marriage, birth order, education and occupation are described in Table 1 through Table 2. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for the age, height, weight and duration of marriage. Table 3 describes the demographic variables of the sample and Table 2 describes the descriptive statistics of sub-scales of body image. The findings of t-test are presented in Table 4.

Table 1 It shows that mean age of the sample is 34.27years, height is 5.44, weight is 67.33 and mean duration of marriage is 2years and 5months

Variables	N	M	SD
Age (years)	200	34.27	5.13
Height	200	5.44	0.36
Weight	200	67.33	11.88
Duration of marriage (years)	200	2.5	1.26

Mean age, height, weight and duration of marriage.

Table 2 Mean and Standard deviation of sub-scales of multidimensional body self-relations questionnaire and The Depression Anxiety Stress scale

Variables	N	M	SD
Multidimensional body self-relations questionnaire sub-scales			
Appearance evaluation	200	11.84	4.19
Appearance orientation	200	24.46	2.81
Fitness evaluation	200	7.05	1.91
Fitness orientation	200	24.08	3.23
Subjective weight	200	8.7	2.31
Body areas satisfaction	200	30.65	6.64

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics of Demographic Information’s of entire sample

Variables	Frequency	Percentages
Educational level		
Graduation (14 th grade)	81	40.50%
Masters (16 th grade)	69	34.50%
Post masters (Above 16 th grade)	50	25%
Family system		
Nuclear	93	46.50%
Joint	107	53.50%
Birth order		
1 st Born	47	23.50%
Middle born	64	32%
Last born	17	8.50%
Occupation		
Govt-job	81	40.50%
Private job	69	34.50%
Non-working	50	25%
Type of marriage		
Arrange	144	72%
Love	56	28%

It shows most of the married adults has educational level (14th grade, 40%), Govt job (40.5%), arrange marriage (72%) and middle born (32%), and they belong to both nuclear and joint family.

Table 4 There is statistically significant difference on the body image variables (4) fitness evaluation and (6) body area satisfaction

Variables	M	SD	t	df	p
Appearance evaluation					
Males	11.55	2.29	-1.781	197.987	0.076
Females	12.13	2.31			
Appearance orientation					
Males	24.72	2.78	1.33	197.931	0.184
Females	24.19	2.83			
Fitness evaluation					
Males	7.4	1.95	2.627	196.881	0.009
Females	6.7	1.81			
Fitness orientation					
Males	23.81	3.25	-1.161	197.943	0.247
Females	24.34	3.2			
Subjective weight					
Males	8.48	1.92	-1.348	181.26	0.179
Females	8.92	2.63			
Body area satisfaction					
Males	32.59	7.02	4.308	189.028	0
Females	28.71	5.63			

Mean, SD and t-tests of Males and Females on the six domains of Body Image.

Note: $p < .05^*$

Discussion

Physical attractiveness has a considerable social advantage therefore society placed much value on appearance which lead to adoption of society ideals thin for women and muscular body for men. In past studies the focus was females with reference of negative body image and ignored the males. Some studies conducted on males but their results were unclear.⁸

Therefore, the one purpose of this study was to examine the gender difference regarding body image. Results reveal discrepancy that there was not an overall gender difference in body image (Table 4). However, difference was found on sub-scales of body image (fitness evaluation and body area satisfaction). Men were slightly more concerned about their fitness and involved in activities to improve their physical fitness as compare to females while females were found more dissatisfied from their different body parts as compare to males. These results align with recent researches that body image is equally important issues for males too. But qualitatively men and women defined body image differently; generally females of all ages striving for thin body while men are about to divided into two groups one who want to loss weight and the other one to gain weight.⁹ With the same line concluded that men and women body image dissatisfaction was qualitatively different. Men were more disturbed to with specific body parts they desire the specific areas (chest, shoulders and stomach) to be larger. Men were less critical of their body size and shape but with the increase of BMI lead to dissatisfaction with body in both genders.¹⁰

Furthermore, several other researches indicated that body image affected by many variables such as culture, social status, gender and other personality difference but literature was lacking to explain all these variables and that how they affect body image. More recent studies have begun to explore these factors with relation to body image. Exposure of ideal body image threatens well-being of males and females. Now-a-days male body is also presented by media in objectified manner than has been in the past which increased body dissatisfaction in males.¹¹ The previous studies indicated that concerns about body image were more common in women than men Cash, 1994 postulated that negative evaluation of body image and investment in appearance were more common in women rather than men but men were also equally concerned about change in weight and shape of body. Evaluation of body image and investment of appearance were predictors of negative body image in both genders.¹²

Results from the present study indicated there was not an overall gender difference in body image these findings lend to support the idea that negative body image may have greater gender specific manifestations than has been previously explored or may be gender serve as a buffer against the risk to develop negative body image. No gender differences in body image dissatisfaction were found thus suggesting that with the passage of time the level of dissatisfaction in men and women become parallel.^{8,9}

Despite these findings, comparatively little studies have focused on the unique factors important for understanding male body image. Usually researches on women were used to conceptualize body image in both genders but it failed to adequately explain the body image in men. There is need to explore the important factor of muscularity with reference to male body image in order to better understand the gender difference.

Conclusion

The current study contributed to add knowledge in the literature regarding body-image, in the context of Pakistani culture. There is not overall gender difference regarding body image variables which showed that both genders equally experience negative body image. This study underlines the importance of being aware of the potential for sociocultural influences to adversely affect the populations.

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Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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