

Relationship of Body Image and Mental Health

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ABSTRACT: *Body image is a person's perception of the aesthetics or sexual attractiveness of their own body. The human body gets constantly change from birth to death. The changes in appearances and physical competencies are intensive particularly in puberty. The rapid physical changes that occurs in puberty have important effects on the body image. Mental health is a level of psychological well-being, or an absence of mental illness. It is the psychological state of someone who is functioning at a satisfactory level of emotional and behavioural adjustment. Good mental health can enhance one's life, while poor mental health can prevent someone from living an enriching life. Mental health and stability is a very important factor for defining body image of an individual. The article aims to investigate the relationship of body image and mental health. The relationship between mental health and body image can be seen as bi-directional.*

INTRODUCTION

Body image is, how and what one thinks and feel about her /his body. It includes the picture of the body in his/her mind, which might or might not match his/her body's actual shape, size and weight. Therefore, body image plays key role for adolescent students in their physical look and psychological wellbeing. Body image is defined as a self-attitude towards one's body, be it with size, shape or aesthetics (Cash, T. and Prunzinsky, T, 2004). Some of the aspects that the broader term body image attempts to cover are: weight satisfaction, size perception accuracy, body satisfaction, appearance satisfaction, appearance evaluation, appearance orientation, body esteem, body concern, body image disturbance, and body image disorder etc. to name a few.

Body weight is associated with body image and health status of students. Body weight is one of the parameters which indicate youthfulness. Perfect shape of body is prime importance for the adolescent students. Body-image may be conceptualized as a multidimensional construct that represents how individuals think, feel, and behave with regard to their own physical attributes (Muth & Cash, 1997). Muth and Cash talk about two facts of body image attitude and they are evaluation (satisfaction or dissatisfaction with one's physical attributes) and affect (experience of discrete emotions).

Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. Mental health is important at every stage of life, from childhood and adolescence through adulthood. Over the course of your life, if you experience mental health problems, your thinking, mood, and behavior could be affected. Many factors contribute to mental health problems, including Biological factors, such as genes or brain chemistry, Life experiences, such as trauma or abuse. From the perspective of positive psychology or holism, mental health may include an individual's ability to enjoy life, and create a balance between life activities and efforts to achieve psychological resilience. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), mental health includes subjective well-being, perceived self-efficacy, autonomy, competence, inter-generational dependence, and self-actualization of one's intellectual and emotional potential, among others. The WHO further states that the well-being of an individual is encompassed in the realization of their abilities, coping with normal stresses of life, productive work and contribution to their community. Cultural differences, subjective assessments, and competing professional theories all affect how "mental health" is defined.

According to the U.K. surgeon general (1999), mental health is the successful performance of mental function, resulting in productive activities, fulfilling relationships with other people, and providing the ability to adapt to change and cope with adversity. The term mental illness refers collectively to all diagnosable mental disorders health conditions characterized by alterations in thinking, mood, or behavior associated with distress or impaired functioning (National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, 2011). Mental health can be seen as an unstable continuum, where an individual's mental health may have many different possible values. (Keyes, Corey L. M. 1 January 2002). Mental wellness is generally viewed as a positive attribute, even if the person does not have any diagnosed mental health condition. This definition of mental health highlights emotional well-being, the capacity to live a full and creative life, and the flexibility to deal with life's inevitable challenges. Some discussions are formulated in terms of contentment or happiness. (Graham, Michael C. 2014).

Body image encompasses many different factors and includes how you feel when you see/think about your own body, what you might believe about your own appearance, and how you might feel in your body. Many people of all ages, genders, and cultures may struggle with body image and have a negative perception of their own body and appearance. With the increased use of technology and more involvement and use of social media platforms, it doesn't come as a surprise that negative body image is becoming more of concern across the global. Body image and self-esteem start in the mind, not in the mirror. They can change the way you understand your value and worth. Healthy body image and self-esteem are a big part of well-being.

Body image is mental and emotional, it's both the mental picture that you have of your body and the way you feel about your body when you look in a mirror. Healthy body image is more than simply tolerating what you look like or "not disliking" yourself. A healthy body image means that you truly accept and like the way you look right now, and aren't trying to change your body to fit the way you think you should look. It means recognizing the individual qualities and strengths that make you feel good about yourself beyond weight, shape or appearance, and resisting the pressure to strive for the myth of the "perfect" body that you see in the media, online, in your communities.

Self-esteem is how you value and respect yourself as a person—it is the opinion that you have of yourself inside and out. Self-esteem impacts how you take care of yourself, emotionally, physically, and spiritually. self-esteem is about your whole self, not just your body. When you have good self-esteem, you value yourself, and you know that you deserve good care and respect—from yourself and from others. You can appreciate and celebrate your strengths and your abilities, and you don't put yourself down if you make a mistake. Good self-esteem means that you still feel like you're good enough even when you're dealing with difficult feelings or situations.

Linking of Body Image and Mental Health

The relationship between mental health and body image can be seen as bi-directional. Having poor self-esteem and a sense of low self-worth can result in emotional distress, which can prompt young people to seek a 'solution', such as changing/controlling their body image to attempt to feel better about themselves. Conversely, an intense focus on body that is encouraged by media exposure (without informed literacy), or the attitudes of a peer group or home environment, can lead to a sense of self overly focused on body image. This focus can result in mental states of anxiety and depression.

When Mental Health is in jeopardy it's better to know the signs that more support is needed for your own mental health. If your body image struggles have negatively impacted your life to the point that you are unable to carry out with normal life and activities, this is a red flag that should not be ignored. Feelings of depression or anxiety around your appearance or body image are not normal and should not be overlooked. Confide in a loved one or someone you can trust as a beginning point for recovering from poor body image.

Experiences of gender, body image, and mental health are very important to examine any individual personality, as the bodily changes they experience may have psychological consequences, and at the same time their age, gender, and ethnicity may also affect how their bodies are viewed and treated. Body image has been established as an important component of both mental health (i.e., depression and anxiety) and physical health, (eating disorder).

Body weight and depression are positively associated among college-age through middle age of any gender. (Forman-Hoffman, Yankey, Hillis, Wallace, & Wolinsky, 2007). Body dissatisfaction has also been linked to unhealthy behaviors and poor psychological functioning (Bedford & Johnson, 2006) and to various forms of psychopathology, including disordered eating, depression, and anxiety among younger (college-age through middle age) women (Forman & Davis, 2005; Tylka & Hill, 2004). However, despite the fact that body and weight dissatisfaction have been linked to a number of serious mental health problems for younger women, few studies have examined the effect of body image on mental health among 19 older women (Peat, Peyerl, & Muehlenkamp, 2008). Depression has been identified as the most prevalent cause of emotional suffering and has a significant negative effect on quality of life among everyone (Berkman et. al., 1986).

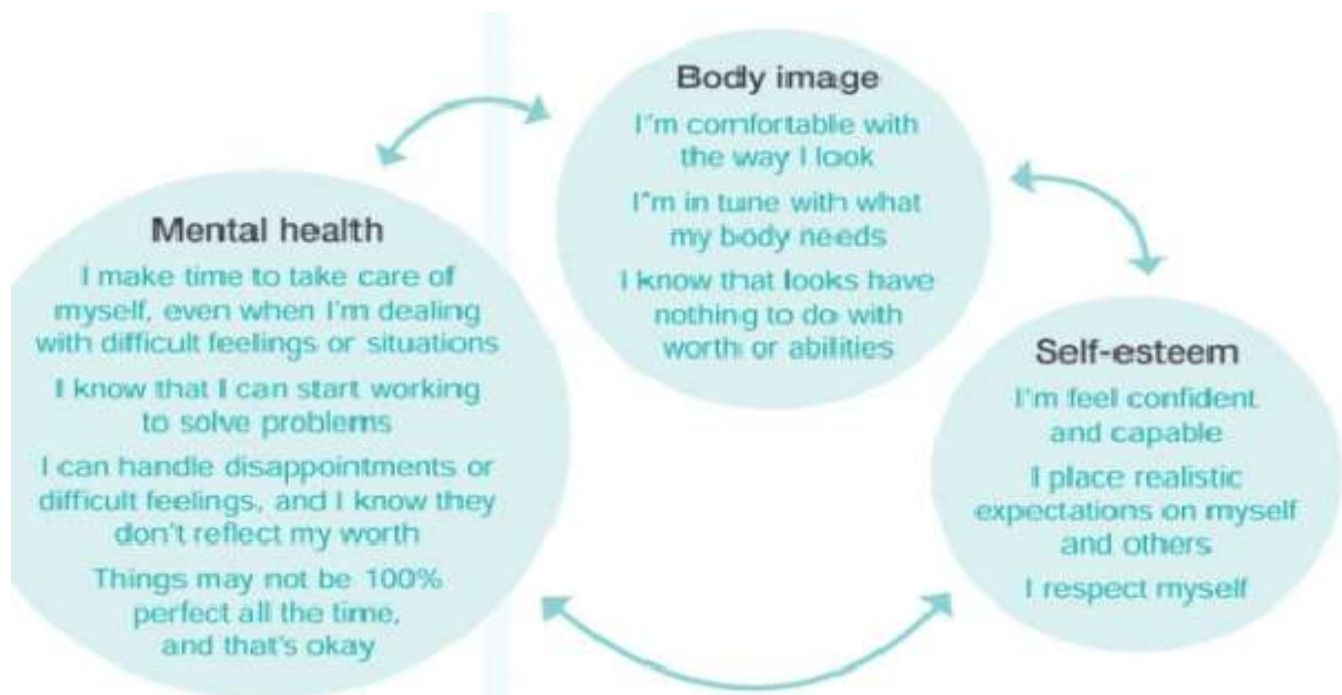
Depression is also a risk factor for negative health outcomes, including mortality, poor immune function, and poor recovery from illness (Glass, De Lwon, Bassuk, & Berkman, 2006). Despite the importance of treating depressive symptoms among older adults, this population has been found to utilize mental health services at lower rates than younger adults. mental health may be strongly affected by bodily changes, specifically changes in physical functioning and ability. Maintaining physical functioning has been associated with positive gains in terms of both physical and mental health. Physical activity has been associated with positive mood, general well-being, and improved mental health (Blake, Mo, Malik, & Thomas, 2009; Chodzko-Zajko, Schwingel, & Park, 2009).

Impact of Negative Body Image- Sadly, negative body image is becoming more and more prevalent and starting at younger ages. Studies have shown that over 40 percent of 1st-3rd grade girls want to be thinner (Collins, M. E. 1991), and over 80 percent of ten-year olds are afraid of being fat (Mellin, L., McNutt, S., Hu, Y., Schreiber, G. B., Crawford, P., & Obarzanek, E. 1997). Body dissatisfaction, especially at this early age, can lead to more complex issues, including mental health problems like eating disorders, mood disorders, and/or personality disorders. Mental health issues can exacerbate negative body image, creating a vicious cycle that is difficult to break out from.

Why do body image and self-esteem matter?

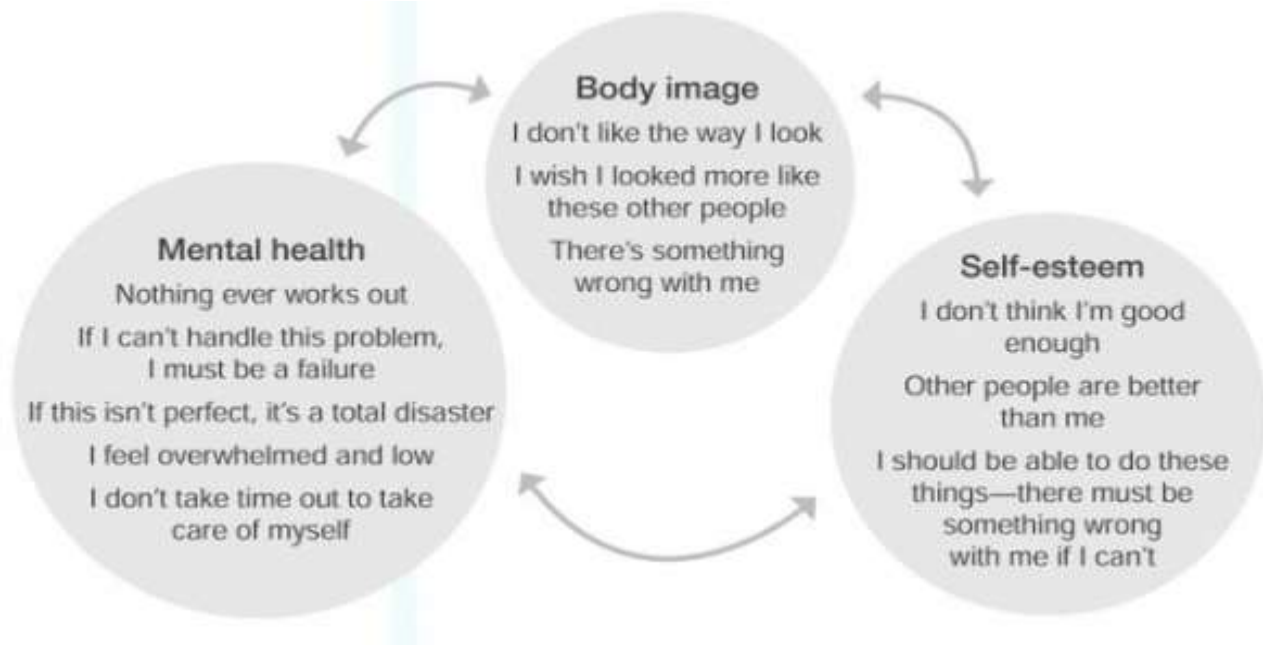
Body image and self-esteem directly influence each other—and your feelings, thoughts, and behaviours. If you don't like your body (or a part of your body), it's hard to feel good about your whole self. The reverse is also true: if you don't value yourself, it's hard to notice the good things and give your body the respect it deserves.

Below, see how good body image and self-esteem positively impact mental health:



These are just a few examples. As you can see, good body image, self-esteem, and mental health are not about making yourself feel happy all the time. They are really about respecting yourself and others, thinking realistically, and taking action to cope with problems or difficulties in healthy ways.

Below, see how poor body image and self-esteem negatively impact mental health:



As you can see, the problem with negative thinking and feelings is that once people start to focus on shortcomings or problems in one area or one situation, it becomes very easy to only see problems in many other areas or situations. Negative thinking has a way of leading to more negative thinking.

Thankfully, with appropriate support, help and intervention, it is possible to improve upon negative body image and prevent more severe mental health issues from developing further. The important thing is early identification: when you are aware of poor body image, reach out for the help and support you need to recover.

How can I encourage a healthier body image?

Eat well-balanced meals and exercise because it makes you feel good and strong, not as a way to control your body.

Notice when you judge yourself or others based on weight, shape, or size. Ask yourself if there are any other qualities you could look for when those thoughts come up.

Dress in a way that makes you feel good about yourself, in clothes that fit you now.

Find a short message that helps you feel good about yourself and write it on mirrors around your home to remind you to replace negative thoughts with positive thoughts.

Surround yourself with positive friends and family who recognize your uniqueness and like you just as you are

The next time you notice yourself having negative thoughts about your body and appearance, take a minute to think about what's going on in your life. Are you feeling stressed out, anxious, or low? Are you facing challenges in other parts of your life? When negative thoughts come up, think about what you'd tell a friend if they were in a similar situation and then take your own advice

How can I maintain positive body image?

Positive body image has a massive beneficial effect on life, including an increase in self-esteem, confidence and many people reporting a generally happier outlook and more success in their lives. The key points to body confidence are;

- 1) Learning to accept your body
- 2) Learning to be able to talk about your body, steering the conversation away from negative talk people often engage in
- 3) Accepting that everybody is unique and that is what makes us beautiful

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