



# BODY-IMAGE AND SOCIAL ANXIETY AMONG ADOLESCENT FEMALES

Pauline Christina S<sup>1</sup> Mrs. AlimaZehra<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>UG Student, <sup>2</sup>Head of the Department of Psychology

<sup>1</sup>Department of Psychology

<sup>1</sup>Chevalier T. Thomas Elizabeth College for Women, Chennai, India

**Abstract:** The adolescent period is associated with rising concern for physical appearance. The image we have about our body has diverse impacts on our mental and physical health which influences our behaviour and mental processes in social situations. When an individual is insecure about his/her appearance it might cause elevation in their anxiety levels. A negative body image can negatively influence a person's thought processes. Adolescent females relatively have more concern about their physical appearance and higher rates of prevalence of social anxiety are identified among them. Therefore, this study aims to assess the influence of body-image on an individual's mental attitudes and how it in turn triggers social anxiety. This is a qualitative research and is done using interview method. The sample population consists of 20 adolescent females between the ages of 17-18. The intense fear of being judged by others based on their appearance and the insecurity among adolescent females that restricts them from social interaction substantially affects their mental health, making them more vulnerable to depression and anxiety disorders. Therefore, timely intervention is mandatory to curb the ill effects associated with social anxiety.

**Keywords:** Body-image, social anxiety, adolescent period, depression, anxiety disorders.

## I. INTRODUCTION

During the adolescent age there are a series of changes throughout the body which includes changes in physical, physiological and mental aspects. These changes become more pronounced throughout the adolescent ages. According to Pliner et al., (2016), females are more concerned about their body image and appearance than males. Some females might feel insecure about the changes and become more susceptible to anxiousness when they realise that they had to socialise and interact with others. When this concern for body image exceeds a certain level it might become a source of social anxiety. Some become more prone to anxiety when they fear of being negatively evaluated by others based on their physical appearance.

**Body image:** It is the picture and thoughts we have about our body. Body image is the perception of one's physical self. These feelings and perceptions may be negative or positive and can be influenced by both internal and external factor which includes parents, peers, media, culture and past experiences (Burmeister, 2019). Body image plays a major role in contributing towards one's mental health. "Body image is defined as the picture we have in our minds about the size, shape and form of our bodies and our feelings concerning these characteristics and our constituent body parts". (Slade, 1988). The body-image image includes the feelings, perceptions, beliefs, and associated behaviours about one's own body (Gillen & Markey 2016). The four aspects of body image include:

Perceptual: How an individual perceives his own body.

Affective: An individual's feeling about his body.

Cognitive: Thoughts and beliefs about one's body.

Behavioural: Actions taken in relation to body-image

Therefore a positive body image is necessary for the well being of an individual.

**Social Anxiety:** Social anxiety is the feeling of nervousness and anxiety that leads to avoidance of social situations. It may also make people worry about socialising with others, thus making them feel incompetent. Social anxiety also known as social phobia is the persistent and immense fear of social situations. When this prevails it becomes a chronic mental health condition known as Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD). Individuals who fear of being negatively evaluated or judged by others and those who have experienced trauma are prone to develop social anxiety. Social anxiety can also lead to low self-esteem and poor social skills. When a person has a negative body image there may be an increased concern about how others perceive her and this may in turn trigger social anxiety, which is accompanied by avoidance of social situations. Since social anxiety mostly begins at adolescence (Leigh & M. Clark 1995), people of this age tend to avoid social situations with anticipation of being considered unpleasant; as they are more self-conscious.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### 2.1 Review of literature for body-image:

**(Pawijit et al., 2019)** This cross sectional study aimed to examine the role of fear of negative evaluation in the association between body image dissatisfaction and social anxiety. Results showed positive association among body-image dissatisfaction, fear of negative evaluation and social anxiety.

**(Ackard & Peterson, 2001)** This study aimed to examine the associations between puberty and disordered eating, body image and other psychological variables. It was found that people who perceived themselves to be overweight prior to puberty scored significantly higher on measure of disordered eating, body dissatisfaction, asceticism, drive for thinness and that they may be at the risk of developing related problems.

**(Trigemann & Lynch, 2001)** The purpose of this study was to investigate women's body image across their entire life span based on the theoretical perspective of objectification theory. It was found that body dissatisfaction remains stable across the age range but self objectification, habitual body monitoring, appearance anxiety and disordered eating decreased with age.

**(Davison & McCabe, 2006)** This study examined the relationship between various aspects of body image and psychosocial functioning. It was found that girls tend to report more negative body image than boys and relevance of body image to self-esteem was similar for boys and girls.

**(Wasyliw et al., 2012)** They studied the relationship between self compassion and women's body image. It was found that high self compassion predicted fewer body concerns independently of self-esteem and high scores of self compassion predicted less eating guilt independent of self-esteem.

### 2.2 Review of literature for social anxiety:

**(Dixit & Lugman, 2018)** The study was conducted to study the relationship between body image, social anxiety and psychological distress among young adults which found a positive correlation between body image and social anxiety as well as in body image and psychological distress.

**(Ratnasari et al., 2021)** This study which aimed to determine the relationship between body image and social anxiety among adolescent girls, found a negative correlation between body image and social anxiety and that decreased body image predicted increased social anxiety.

**(Aderka et al., 2014)** The study which examined body image variables among 68 outpatients with primary Obsessive Compulsion Disorder, Social Anxiety Disorder and panic disorder found that SAD symptoms predicted body image disturbances, appearance evaluation and body areas satisfaction and OCD symptoms predicted appearance orientation.

**(Jarrar et al., 2022)** This study which analysed the mediating role of social anxiety on the relationship between social media usage and body dissatisfaction found that social anxiety moderates the relationship between social media usage and body dissatisfaction, and that people with increased levels of social anxiety are prone to body dissatisfaction issues as a result of increased social media usage.

**(Krzempek & Karolina, 2012)** This study which aimed to examine the relationship between age, self-esteem, body-esteem and social anxiety for male and female samples found that age, self-esteem and sexual attractiveness predict social anxiety in females and body-esteem, age and self-esteem did not predict social anxiety in males.

## III. NEED FOR THE STUDY

This research aims to gain an understanding about body image and social anxiety among adolescent females. Currently there is a rising concern about appearance in social situations and it is found to trigger anxiety in adolescent females as they expect themselves to be appealing. Therefore this study helps to get clarity about their thoughts and opinions concerning the same.

## IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 Research design

The research design applied here is qualitative. This focuses on obtaining a deeper understanding about the individual's beliefs, experiences and attitudes through the interview method.

### 4.2 Research method

This research was conducted through interview method where the participants were asked to present their thoughts and feelings to a set of questions raised to them. Each student was interviewed individually and in live face to face manner. They were informed that their responses will be maintained confidential and their responses were recorded.

### 4.3 Sample design

The sample population consists of 20 female undergraduate students between the ages 17-18. All of them had normal height and weight.

#### 4.4 Variables

The two variables used are body-image and social anxiety

Body image: The thoughts and feelings we have about our body combine to form body image.

Social Anxiety: The overwhelming fear of social situations which influences everyday activities and relationships is known as social anxiety.

#### 4.5 Operational definition:

**Body image:** Body image can be seen as the perceptions and attitudes one holds towards one's own body, especially, but not exclusively, one's physical appearance (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2004)

**Social Anxiety:** Social Anxiety is defined as the marked and persistent fear of social and performance situations. (Jefferson, 2001).

#### 4.6 Procedure administration

The following 6 questions were used to collect the qualitative data from the participants through interview method.

1. What do you think about your body and appearance?
2. Do you criticize your body ? If so why ?
3. What insecurity do you have about your body?
4. What are your thoughts about your body while going out to other places?
5. How do you feel about your appearance in public places?
6. Can you go to social events calmly?

#### 4.7 Ethical consideration

The participants' involvement in the interview was wholly optional and the privacy of their responses was protected. Prior to the interview participants informed consent was obtained. The researcher addressed the need for the study in addition to providing a brief summary of the study. There after the students were appreciating for their participation in the interview.

### V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results show that majority of participants have a negative body image and therefore they have social anxiety concerning their appearance to some extent.. The findings show that a negative body image increases the probability of social anxiety therefore making the individual feeling less confident in social situations. **75%** of the participants reported a negative body image and symptoms of social anxiety. They were insecure about their hair growth, skin tone, height, body shape and overall appearance as they felt that they were not in the proper category of those factors. They also reported that they wanted to change their appearance in the future as they were not satisfied with their appearance. They have also had social anxiety which made them to avoid social situations and feel anxious while meeting new people. They also feared of being ignored and judged by others. They have also been more critical about their own appearance. The participants with a negative body image had always wished for a better appearance, with fair skin, less hair fall, a lean and tall body structure. **15%** were always examining their appearance when they are in public places. Few also reported that they use makeup or face mask to cover their faces to reduce social anxiety while some of the others altogether avoided social situations. The rest **35%** of the participants had a positive body image and had no social anxiety. They were very much confident about their appearance and felt comfortable in all aspects of their body image. **10%** reported that they felt overwhelmed only when they were judged by others even though they had no insecurities about their appearance. They felt anxious or concerned only when they were triggered by an external stimulus. One important note is that all the participants had normal body height and weight and they never had an unhealthy appearance. There were no major difference between the appearances of those with positive body image and negative body image. All participants were almost from similar socio-economic backgrounds. This shows that these perceptions were solely created by themselves in their minds. The negative body image might be created due to past traumatic experience, unfavourable surroundings and less mental support from their families and friends which makes them vulnerable to social anxiety. Those with positive body image seem to have better surroundings and environment. This shows that their body-image is influenced by past experiences and this in turn has an impact on social anxiety of the individual.

### VI. CONCLUSION

Having a positive body image is essential for the well being of an individual. A good body image helps the individual to perform better in social circumstances and provided confidence to interact with others. As the adolescent females have more expectations regarding their appearance in early stages of adolescence, they are worried when they are unable to meet their expectations. This may decrease the satisfaction they have about their body. An optimistic attitude is required to cope up with their negative body image. It is essential to be less critical about oneself and to accept their appearance. More mature adolescents come to an understanding about their appearance and begin to accept their looks at earlier than other adolescents. Negative body image in the long run may lower self-esteem, self-confidence and may cause depression and social anxiety. Practising self-love, mindfulness and other intervention strategies are highly essential to have a positive body image. A positive body image makes one feel more confident and less anxious in social situations. Therefore it is highly essential to maintain a proper body image to prevent social anxiety.

### VII. IMPLICATION

This study shows the current opinions of an adolescent female between the ages 17-18 about her appearance and her behaviour in social situations. Many programs can be conducted to improve a poor body image and further tips and strategies can be provided to boost body image. Many habits such as maintaining a positive self-talk routine, exercise and sleep routine and learning stress-reduction skills may aid better mental and physical health.

## VIII. LIMITATION

One major limitation of this study is that it was conducted on a small population and the sample participants were college students. In order to generalize the results a further study needs to be conducted on a larger population.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Pawijit, Y., Likhitsuwan, J.L., Ludington, J., & Pisitsungkagarn, K. (2017). Looks can be deceiving: body image dissatisfaction relates to social anxiety through fear of negative evaluation. *International Journal of Adolescent Medicine and Health* <https://doi.org/10.1515/ijamh-2017-0031>
- [2] Ackard, D.M., & Peterson, C. B. (2001). Association between puberty and disordered eating, body image, and other psychological variables. *International Journal of Eating Disorders* [https://doi.org/10.1002/1098-108X\(200103\)29:2%3C187::AID-EAT1008%3E3.0.CO;2-R](https://doi.org/10.1002/1098-108X(200103)29:2%3C187::AID-EAT1008%3E3.0.CO;2-R)
- [3] Tiggemann, M., & Lynch, J. E. (2001). Body image across the life span in adult women: The role of self objectification. *Developmental Psychology*, 37(2), 243- 253 <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/0012-1649.37.2.243>
- [4] Davison, T. E., & McCabe, M. P. (2010). Adolescent Body Image and Psychosocial Functioning. *The Journal of Social Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.3200/SOCP.146.1.15-30>
- [5] Wasylikiw, L., & MacLellan, A. M. (2012). Exploring link between self-compassion and body image in university women. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2012.01.007>
- [6] Luqman, N., & Dixit, S. (2017) Body Image, Social Anxiety and Psychological Distress among Young Adults. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary and Current Research* <http://ijmcr.com/body-image-social-anxiety-and-psychological-distress-among-young-adults/>
- [7] Ratnasari, S. E., Pratiwi, I., & Wildannisa, H. (2021) RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BODY IMAGE AND SOCIAL ANXIETY IN ADOLESCENT WOMEN. *European Journal of Psychological Research* <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1YL7OdNhZtTqJjpA6YfYIWm8FvAJxrJUN/view?usp=drivesdk>
- [8] Aderka, I. M., Gutner, C. A., Lazarov, A., & Hermesh, H. (2013) Body image in social anxiety disorder, obsessive compulsion disorder, and panic disorder [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/257462529\\_Body\\_image\\_in\\_social\\_anxiety\\_disorder\\_obsessive-compulsive\\_disorder\\_and\\_panic\\_disorder](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/257462529_Body_image_in_social_anxiety_disorder_obsessive-compulsive_disorder_and_panic_disorder)
- [9] Jarrar, Y., Ayodeji, O. A., & Nweke, G. E. (2022). The Mediating Effect of Social Anxiety on Relationship between Social Media Use and Body Dissatisfaction Among University Students. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2022.900257>
- [10] Krzempek, & Karolina (2012). Body image: can body image dissatisfaction predict social anxiety? <https://hdl.handle.net/10788/439>