

## A review on body image concerns among men and its consequences

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### ABSTRACT

It is often that when we talk about body image it is mostly discussed in context of women and men are mostly disregarded. With growing trend of having a perfect body and high standards of body ideal, it has become difficult to achieve body satisfaction among both men and women. This review gives a comprehensive overview of concerns related to body image among men and further risks.

**Keywords:** *Body image, body concerns, body satisfaction, body dissatisfaction*

People in the 21<sup>st</sup> century feel more dissatisfied with their bodies than people from earlier time due to the rise of fitness, scope of cosmetic surgery and portrayal of high beauty standards. The concept of masculinity and femininity has been associated with certain body features and appearances of a person. In modern times, masculinity is usually seen through body of heavy built with full biceps and triceps, eight pack abs, lean waist and broad shoulder. Men are also subjected to achieve these unattainable body goals through magazines, television, media and even peers. Body image perception and satisfaction researches have only discussed the constructs of female population but body image concerns among men has immense stigma attached to it. It is often undiagnosed and barely treated because men are required to be manly and tough due to the social construct of masculinity.

Body image is an individual perception of himself and his feelings towards his body. This term was first coined by Austrian neurologist and psychoanalyst Paul Schilder in his book '*The Image and Appearance of the Human Body (1935)*'. Literature on body image has been concerned with two aspects; Body perception and body satisfaction.

*Body perception* is related to the physical aspect of their body. This is an individual's assessment of the physical aspects (e.g. body weight, body shape, height etc) of their body and the extent to which this assessment is accurate.

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*Body satisfaction* refers to the feelings of fulfillment related to those physical aspects. Individuals with body satisfaction have positive body image while individual with negative body image have body dissatisfaction; they believe that people around them have better body features or they are more attractive.

Unfortunately, individual with body image concerns usually do not have body satisfaction instead they are dissatisfied with their physical self. The possible negative body image is obesity or overweight, exposure to ideal body image, attitudes of family and peers and unhealthy behaviours.

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### *Aim*

- This study aim to understand the body image concerns among men and their mental health risks.

#### *Objective*

- This study extensively reviews the literature and empirical studies concerning body image issues among men and related risks.

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURES**

#### *Body Image concerns among men*

Literature on body image has been focusing on women concerns and there is a limited research on men body mage concerns as women are subjected to attaining ideal body image more than men. Height, weight, hair, body shape, aging and even penis size has been most common concerns of body dissatisfaction among men in the last three decades. A study by Cash et al. (1986) found that of men were generally dissatisfied with their looks (34%), weight (41%), muscle tone (32%), upper torso (28%), mid-torso (50%), and lower torso (21%). Furnham & Greaves (1994) found that men are particularly dissatisfied with their biceps, shoulders, chest, and tone of the muscle. Men desire a larger chest size than their actual size (Tantleff-Dunn & Thompson, 2000). A study by Rawhide revealed 18% of adolescent males were most worried about their weight and physique (Malcore, 2016), while 29% were preoccupied with their appearances and 50% had constant complaints about how they look.

C. Davis & Cowles, 1991 study revealed that men prefer to be bigger and heavier than thinner and see thinness as weakness and they engage in body shape altering activities (exercising, dieting, surgery etc). Pornographic media has been displaying men with large penis size creating a market for penis enlargement devices and creating dissatisfaction among men. This representation often leads men to underestimate their own genital size. Morrison et al, (2005) found that men's satisfaction with their genital size is linked with body satisfaction. Researchers have suggested that men tend to over-report their height because taller men have a variety of more positive outcomes than shorter man.

Blashill and Van der Wal (2009) found that body height is an body image concern for most parts of American men. A survey by Chaudhary (1996) showed that six out of 10 men have reduced food intake to lose weight. Body dissatisfaction with thinness is present in both homosexual and heterosexual male increases with age (Tiggerman et. al., 2007). Men show body dissatisfaction with both being too thin (Raudenbush and Zellner 1997) and being too fat (Cash and Muth, 2006).

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Men also relate to muscularity to body fat and body fat dissatisfaction is linked with muscularity dissatisfaction by many researchers ((Hildebrandt, Langenbacher, & Schlundt, 2004). Well-being of both homosexual and heterosexual men is associated with muscularity satisfaction and body fat satisfaction (Bergeron & Tylka, 2007).

In a study by O’Gorman (2008) revealed that male body dissatisfaction is less common than female body dissatisfaction while also revealing that talking about these concerns are socially undesirable which happens due to less media representation of male body image concerns. Duane Hargreaves and Marika Tiggemann found that young men resistant to talk about their concerns as it is not considered gender appropriate.

### ***Consequences of Body Image Concerns***

Body perception and satisfaction among men is influenced by many factors such as genetics, environment, media, peers and parental influences, gender and psychological factors. Wade et. al., 2001 found a genetic link for some aspects of body image while environment has direct impact on creating negative or positive body image. Exposure to idealized body image has been seen to be directly affecting the body satisfaction and body perception (Grabe, Ward, & Hyde, 2008). In pop culture media has also contributed in the idea of a perfect body image. Magazines (Grogan, Williams, and Connor, 1996), calendars, television (Agliata & Tantleff–Dunn, 2004), music videos and even action toys (Barlett et al., 2005) has been portraying men with increasing muscularity. In a study by Mintz and Betz (1986) it was found that level of body satisfaction is linked with low social self-esteem in both men and women. The researches have shown that man feels the pressure of attaining these ideals portrayed in media and have decreased self–esteem (Muris, Meesters, van de Blom, & Mayer, 2005), decreased body satisfaction, and decreased body esteem. Males engage in steroid and dietary supplement use, and high protein dieting in order to gain weight and muscle (Wojtowicz and von Ranson, 2006). In a study by Pope et al., (2000), finding indicated that men indulge in using Human Growth Hormone for muscle gain. Both males and females engage in excessive exercising to attain ideal body image.

Media portrays some male body image ideals which are internalized by boys at a very young age and they become engrossed to attain that body ideal. Leit, Gray, & Pope (2002) have suggested that men could become preoccupied with gaining muscle mass by internalizing this muscular-ideal message. A disorder called muscle dysmorphia can manifest among men due to this pathological preoccupation leaving them to form misperception about their muscle (Pope, Gruber, Choi, Olivardia, & Phillips, 1997). Blouin & Goldfield (1995) found that men indulge in anabolic steroid use, severe food restriction, and excessive exercise due to the misperception of their muscle tone.

Many researchers have linked depression and body dissatisfaction such as Cohane et al. (2001) found a relationship between depression and body image among boys. Cafri et. al. (2005) have linked men body dissatisfaction with depression, low self-esteem and eating disorders. Stoutjesdyk & Jevne (1993) and Thiel, Gottfried, & Hesse, (1993), reported in their studies that athletes are more prone to disordered eating especially who compete in weight restricted sports. Pope, Katz, and Hudson (1993) reported a prevalence of body dysmorphic disorder (BDD) among men where men perceive themselves as small and weak. Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD) in teenage boys has increased three folds with numbers reaching 45% since 1991.

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A model by Thompson et. al. (1999) called tripartite influence model suggests that people engage in restricted eating behavior for body satisfaction. Men engage in behaviors that promote their ideal muscularity and disordered eating behavior to reduce body fat (Tylka et al., 2005). Dieting usually occurs due to body dissatisfaction (Ogden, 2000). 1 out of 4 men suffer from eating disorders, while 31% have admitted to purging (Malcore, 2016).

### DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study is to synthesise the review of literature focusing on body image concerns and related mental health among men. The results showed that men have body image concerns as equal to women. Having a muscular body, proper height and evenly distributed body weight and bigger genital size are considered an ideal body image. Most men have concerns over these areas only. The study also indicated that homosexual men are more concerned with body image than heterosexual men. These concerns have its consequences which are body dissatisfaction, distorted body perception, low social self esteem, and decreased body esteem. Use of steroid drugs and heavy training is also common among men with body image concerns. Depression, body dysmorphia and eating disorder are also the results of these concerns. Further studies are required to understand these concerns among men and intervention are needed to destigmatize the idea of men reporting these issues.

### CONCLUSION

This review highlighted the concerns related to body image among men and its consequences. Men as compared to women report less body dissatisfaction and body image concerns but with the growing portrayal of muscular and toned body in media, magazines, music videos and profession like sports and modeling. Men consider these body ideals attractive and to attain them they engage in health risking behaviors. More research is required in this area as women are extensively studied in this area and the literature is less focused on male population. There is a need to develop positive body image among both sexes at an early age to reduce the health risks of these ideals as the unattainable body ideals will always be present in the society. Men require as much attention as women as men body image issues are less studied and discussed and men find talking about these concerns as undesirable society. Concerns related to body image among men is misunderstood and undiagnosed and is often untreated.

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