

Research Paper

Beyond Appearances: A Comparative Analysis on Gender Differences in Body Shaming Among Adolescents

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ABSTRACT

Body shaming, the act of negatively evaluating and criticizing an individual's physical appearance is a prevalent issue among adolescents, with potentially long-lasting effects on their mental and emotional well-being. This study aimed to explore the phenomenon of body shaming among adolescents in Mysore City with potential gender differences in its occurrence. Employing a cross-sectional design data was collected from a total of 155 randomly selected adolescents aged between 10 to 19 years (male: n=99; and female: n=56). The study utilized a series of standardized protocols and calibrated equipment (measuring tapes and scales) to collect anthropometric measurements (Height, Weight, Waist and Hip Circumference) and further indices (BMI and Waist-Hip ratio). The findings of the study indicated that a significant proportion of female participants (33.95%) were at higher risk for abdominal obesity than their male counterparts (65.7%). Even though there was a difference between genders, no significant association was found between gender and BMI ($p < 0.095$). A highly significant association was found between gender and waist-to-hip ratio ($p < 0.001$). A higher percentage of female participants (23.2%) reported high levels of body shaming as compared to males (7.1%). Further, a highly significant association between gender and body shaming experiences ($p < 0.001$) and a negative correlation between height and body shaming ($r = -.175$) were found. The study highlights the urgency of addressing body shaming among adolescents and emphasizes the necessity for more extensive research involving larger populations to develop intervention strategies and provide adequate support for these specific groups of adolescents.

Keywords: *Body-shaming, Adolescents, Gender-differences, Adolescents, Body Image, Body Shaming*

Adolescence is a prime phase in human development, marked by profound physical, emotional, and psychological changes. During this period, adolescents undergo significant transformations in their bodies as they transition from childhood to adulthood. Besides being a period of physical and emotional maturity, adolescence is a

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period when individuals form their self-concept and body image, which are core aspects of their identity and self-esteem.

Body image refers to an individual's perception and evaluation of their own body's appearance, including size, shape, and physical attributes. It plays a critical role in shaping one's self-esteem and overall mental well-being. Adolescents are highly susceptible to the influence of societal standards of beauty and attractiveness. The media, peer comparisons, and societal expectations often exert immense pressure on them to conform to these standards, leading to heightened concerns about their body image which under extremes can lead to shame and guilt. "Body shaming" includes the act of criticizing, mocking, or belittling individuals based on their physical appearance, particularly when it deviates from societal norms (Cash and Smolak, 2011).

In recent years, due to the rise of social media, adolescents worldwide have been inundated with images of idealized beauty standards. This constant exposure to the portrayal of an idealistic "image" of what is considered beautiful has brought significant attention to the issue of body shaming, particularly among adolescents (Engeln, et al., 2020; Rodgers and Melioli, 2016). Adolescents, who are in the process of forming their self-identity, are particularly vulnerable to the harmful effects of body shaming. Body image perception is how individuals feel about their bodies and is influenced by those around them. This is further complicated by the fact that adolescents often seek acceptance from their peers by conforming to certain appearance standards, such as hair, body shape, and clothing. When they face rejection, teasing, or bullying, they often isolate themselves and adopt unhealthy diet restrictions and weight control practices. Body shaming can thus, manifest in various forms including weight-based teasing, appearance-related bullying, and the perpetuation of unrealistic beauty ideals. It can occur both in-person and online, with social media platforms amplifying its impact. The consequences of body shaming in adolescence are multifaceted and can have enduring effects on mental health, self-esteem, and overall well-being (Jiotsa et al., 2021).

Objectives

1. To study the socio-demographic conditions of adolescents.
2. To find the somatic status of adolescents.
3. To assess the prevalence of body shaming among adolescents
4. To investigate the Gender differences in body shaming.

METHODOLOGY

A cross-sectional study was conducted to evaluate body shaming among randomly selected adolescents aged 10 to 19 years, residing in Mysore City. After obtaining informed consent from the participants, a total of 155 students formed the final sample of the study. The primary research tools included a socio-demographic questionnaire and standardized measurement tools for anthropometric data, such as height, weight, BMI, MUAC, skinfold thickness, waist, and hip circumference. The primary research tool used to collect information on body shaming was the *Body Shaming Scale*, which was specifically developed for this study. This scale utilized a Likert format with a total of 35 items, with scores ranging from 1 to 7. A Raw score of below 118 signalled a low level of body shaming, a score of 118 to 185 indicated a moderate level of body shaming, whereas a score of above 185 depicted a high level of body shaming.

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Data Collection and Analysis

A survey using a questionnaire was employed to collect the data from selected participants across various colleges of Mysore city. The investigator visited these colleges to collect permission from the college authorities. Once permission was obtained consent was taken from the participants before distributing the set of questionnaires. The collected data was then entered into MS Excel sheet and SPSS version 16.0 for Windows was used to carry out statistical analysis as per the objectives of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Personal Characteristics of

Variables	No	%	
Gender	Males	99	63.9
	Females	56	36.1
Age	Below 17 years	53	34.2
	17 Years and above	102	65.8
Education group	SSLC	27	17.4
	PUC	99	63.9
	Degree	29	18.7
Mother tongue	Kannada	143	92.3
	Other than Kannada	12	7.7
Religion	Hindus	144	92.9
	Non-Hindus	11	7.1
Total Monthly income of Family	Below Rs. 20000	95	61.3
	Above Rs. 20000	60	38.7

Adolescents

Table 1 indicates the distribution of adolescents based on personal characteristics. A majority of the sample were males (63.9%), identified as Hindus (92.9%), and were above 17 years of age (65.8%), with Kannada as their mother tongue (92.3%). Further, a higher percentage (61.3%) of the sample were from households with a total monthly income of below Rs. 20000 whereas 38.7% were from households with a total monthly income of above Rs. 20000/-.

Table 2: Gender-wise distribution of adolescents based on Nutritional Status

Nutritional Status		Gender						χ^2 Value (df) Sig.
		Females		Males		Total		
		N	%	N	%	N	%	
BMI	Underweight	13	23.2	15	15.2	28	18.1%	6.36 NS (3) 0.095
	Normal	37	66.1	61	66.6	98	63.2%	
	Pre-Obesity	3	5.4	19	19.2	22	14.2%	
	Obesity	3	5.4	4	4.0	7	4.5%	
Waist Hip Ratio	Low risk	19	33.9	65	65.7	84	54.2%	37.15** (2) 0.001
	Medium risk	16	28.6	32	32.3	48	31.0%	
	High risk	21	37.5	2	2.09	23	14.8%	

Table 2 illustrates the gender-wise distribution of adolescents based on their Body Mass Index (BMI) and Waist-Hip-ratios, highlighting gender-specific disparities in nutritional status. It is evident that the majority of female participants (23.4%) were classified as

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underweight, in contrast to males (15.2%). Conversely, a higher proportion of males (19.2%) as compared to females (5.4%) were categorized as pre-obese and both genders displayed similar rates of obesity (males: 4.0%, females: 5.4%). Though there was a gender difference, statistically no significant difference was found in the prevalence of wasting between genders ($p > 0.095$). These differences within both groups suggest that there may be gender-related variations in physical activity, dietary habits, or hormonal influences contributing to the observed differences in nutritional status among adolescents (Zaghloul et al., 2011; Aurino et al., 2019; Thorne et al., 2019).

With respect to waist-hip ratios, a significantly higher percentage of females (37.5%) were at a high risk of abdominal obesity, while the majority of males (65.7%) fell into the "low-risk" category. This discrepancy was highly significant ($p < 0.001$) and underscored a substantial gender-based difference in the abdominal obesity of the two groups. This striking disparity aligns with existing Indian studies, which indicate a higher prevalence of abdominal obesity among female adolescents compared to males (Maruf et al., 2014; Maruf and Udoji, 2015; Kimani et al., 2011; Chopra et al., 2013). Indian women often exhibit a greater predisposition to abdominal obesity, a trend influenced by a combination of factors, including genetic predispositions, cultural dietary patterns, and lifestyle choices (Correa et al., 2017; Tripathy et al., 2016; Ryder et al., 2016).

Table 3: Gender-wise distribution of adolescents based on Body Shaming

Body shaming	Gender						χ^2 value (df) Sig.
	Females		Males		Total		
	No	%	No	%	N	%	
Low body shame	4	7.1	29	29.3	33	21.3%	15.663** (2) 0.0001
Moderate body shame	39	69.6	63	63.6	102	65.8%	
High body shame	13	23.2	7	7.1		12.9%	

Gender disparity in the experience of body shaming as illustrated in Table 3, indicates the significant relationship between the genders and body shaming. A small proportion of female participants (7.1%) and a significantly higher proportion of male participants, (29.3%), depicted low levels of body shame. This finding suggests that males may be less susceptible to experiencing body shame compared to their female counterparts. Conversely, a significantly higher proportion of female participants (23.2%) reported higher levels of body shame compared to males (7.1%). This gender disparity in experiencing body shame was found to be statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), confirming that females were more likely to grapple with high levels of body shame. These findings are in line with previous research that has shown a complex relationship between body image and gender (Duarte and Gouveia, 2017; Troop, 2016; Chen and Russo, 2010; Coelho et al., 2015). The study's results thereby support the notion that *women may experience more significant challenges when it comes to body image and self-esteem, with a notable prevalence of high body shame in this gender group.*

In a nutshell, the observed gender differences in BMI and Waist-Hip ratios among adolescents could potentially contribute to diverse perceptions of body image and subsequently, of the risk of body shaming within these groups. Adolescents are particularly vulnerable to societal pressures and the desire to conform to societal beauty standards,

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making them more susceptible to body shaming (Dhillon and Deepak, 2017; Uchôa et al., 2017; Jackson et al., 2015; Hong, 2006).

Females, with a higher prevalence of underweight and abdominal obesity, may experience body shaming for not conforming to conventional ideals of beauty. They may face criticism for being too thin or, paradoxically, for not having the "ideal" waist-hip ratio. Such pressures can lead to low self-esteem, body dissatisfaction, and even the development of unhealthy eating habits or disordered eating (Uchôa et al., 2017). On the other hand, males, who exhibit a higher pre-obesity rate, might experience body shaming for not adhering to expectations of muscularity and physical fitness. They may encounter pressure to conform to a more muscular physique, potentially leading to unhealthy exercise routines, supplement use, or body image-related stress (Kimani et al., 2011).

These differences further signal the importance of fostering body positivity and self-acceptance in adolescents, irrespective of their BMI or Waist-Hip ratios. Promoting a healthy body image and self-esteem, along with educating adolescents about the diversity of healthy body types, can help mitigate the negative effects of body shaming and its potential impact on mental and physical health. Additionally, it underscores the significance of addressing these gender-specific nutritional disproportions through targeted interventions to support overall well-being and reduce the risk of body shaming (Correa et al., 2017).

Addressing these concerns necessitates targeted interventions. In this regard, physical activity interventions have been proven to enhance movement skills, reduce BMI, and increase physical activity levels in overweight or obese adolescents, ultimately aiding in the prevention and management of obesity (Han et al., 2018; Lee and Kim, 2015; Christodoulos et al., 2006; Elgar et al., 2005).

CONCLUSION

Shame is a deep emotional state resulting from the belief that one's self is inherently flawed and undesirable. Adolescence is a vulnerable period, marked by significant physical and emotional changes, making this demographic particularly susceptible to the harmful effects of body shaming. The findings of this research emphasize several crucial points. Besides underlying the gender differences in body shaming the data indicates a concerning prevalence of adolescents, especially females, at a higher risk of abdominal obesity. This physical characteristic is not only a matter of concern for their immediate health but also serves as a potential trigger for body shaming. These findings underscore the need for interventions that promote positive body image and self-esteem among adolescents, with a particular focus on gender differences to help them navigate the challenges of this critical developmental stage into the next one with greater resilience and confidence.

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Conflict of Interest

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