

Body Weight Perception and its Psychological influences on Women Health

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Abstract

The aim of the study is to examine the relationship among actual body weight, estimated body mass index, the accuracy of weight status perception and its psychological influences on female's mental health as well as weight management behaviors. A semi structure interview was conducted on 10 women between the ages of 25 to 35 years old. The interview consisted of questions addressing BMI measurements, weight perception and its psychological influence and also weight management strategies. Transcripts of the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. Five interconnected themes were identified in the analysis: (a) Depression, (b) social rejection, (c) health issues, and (d) life style. A key finding in the themes was the (a) psychological stress, (b) social pressure, (c) biological factors, and (d) health issues. The conclusions provide valuable understanding of the experiences of BWP. Further, results can be used by researchers, clinicians, mental health providers, and policy makers to address the unique needs of women's caring for and supporting with BWP.

Keywords: Body weight Perception, Psychological influence, Thematic Analysis

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1. Background of the Study

The collective attention in appearance and the growing preference for a attractive body can lead to physical and psychological problems. Understanding the relationship between body actual weight patterns and body weight perception (BWP) is an important influence on female's mental and physical health as well as weight management behaviors. Weight misperceptions appear common amongst females, hypothetically influencing their inspiration to engross in health-related behaviors; however, the direction of impact remains unclear. "Body weight perception" can be described as how perception of one's body can fluctuate from one's actual body weight that is, body weight perception is based on the awareness of one's body weight status as normal, or overweight. Body weight perception can be influenced by many factors such as age, gender and socio-cultural background, self-esteem, positive body image, food beliefs, and mental health status (Y. Wang et al 2009). The literature indicates that BWP having great influence on women's health. From Sep-Nov 2009 a cross-sectional study was carried out on female students in four universities of Karachi, Pakistan. The concluding sample size included 338 female university students. A modified BMI criterion for Asian populations was used. The study examined relationships between body weight perception, actual weight status, and weight control behavior among the female university students of Karachi. Based on measured BMI; the prevalence of underweight, normal weight and overweight females was 27.2%, 51.5% and 21.3% correspondingly. It has been found that there is high rate of body weight misperception in young females that is associated with depression, anxiety and eating disorders according to results (Sirang, et all,2013).

Another study was conducted that examined the prevalence of distorted body weight perception (BWP) and the associations between the psychological features and the different plans for controlling body weight. The study sample consists of 1000 participants including 514 men and 486 women. Among men, 39.30% underestimated, whereas 24.90% of women overestimated their weight. In contrast to 2% of men, 15.20% of women sought medical support to control their weight. The results revealed that participants reported most disapproving psychological problems who seek medical treatment to manage their weight and women who overvalued their weight (M Kim, 2021). According to another study, that aims to investigate the association between body weight perception and depressive symptoms among Korean adults, and potential differential associations across gender. It was found that more depressive symptoms were faced by women who over perceived their weight status compared to those who accurately perceived their weight status (Kim et al, 2018).

1.1: Rationale

Weight perception is the important dimension of body image and plays a significant role in individuals' life. This study examined the prevalence of body weight perception (BWP) and its psychological influences on women health.

In Pakistan, weight perception is unexplored. Not any studies of weight perception can be found despite the fact that it affects eating habits and other aspects of mental health in Pakistan. In previous studies, mostly the focus was on psychological disorders such as depression and anxiety, gender differences and medical treatments. But our study has mainly focused on the perception of women regarding their body weight and how their body weight perception does influence their psychological health. Our study sample is women from general population of early adulthood age. A BMI measure criterion has been used to spread awareness in people. Because the people are unaware about BMI and without checking BMI, they used to label themselves as overweight or underweight. By focusing on BMI measures

people will be aware about importance before developing distorted perceptions and involving unhealthy behaviors.

1.2: Objective of Study

The objective of this study is to find out the relationship between body weight perception and its influences on women psychological health.

1.3: Research Questions

1. What is the association among actual body weight, estimated body mass index, and body weight perception?
2. How the body weight perception psychologically influences women health?
3. What is the association between body weight perception and health related practices?

2: Material and Methodology

To comprehend the experiences of Body Weight Perception and its Psychological influences on Women Health, this study laboring an exploratory qualitative method. A Thematic Analysis was used to evaluate in-depth interviews, as this method allows participants to express their experiences in great detail and permits better understanding of what a group that shares similar concerns feels and believes about their own worldview.

2.1: Participants

Sample of the study included women located at homes (housewives) (N=10), having age range between 25 and 35years. Semi structured interview was used. Data was collected regarding BMI measurements, weight perception accuracy and its psychological influence.

Table of Participant’s Characteristics (Table 1)

Alter Name	Age	Height	Weight	No of children	medical issue	psychological issue
1: Amina	25	4.3	78kg	4	No	No
2: Aaliya	26	4.4	75kg	2	No	No
3: Ayesha	28	5.1	79kg	3	No	No
4: Zenat	27	4.1	69 kg	4	No	No
5: Tania	26	5.1	75kg	3	No	No
6: Farhana	28	5.1	85kg	2	No	No
7: Kousar	32	4.9	74kg	4	No	No
8: Shamsa	26	5.1	79kg	3	No	No
9: Zarmina	25	4.8	70kg	3	No	No
10: Shehla	34	4.6	78kg	2	No	No



2.2: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The study was conducted on women with an age range of 25years- 35years and included married women from all weight categories. Working women’s and women’s with diagnosed eating disorder, depression, heart disease or debits were excluded from study

2.3: Data Collection and Procedure

For the data collection, married women (housewives) were approached and informed consent was taken from the participants. Participants were assured that the data will be kept confidential and the information collected from them will be used only for research purpose and nobody can access their data except the researcher. Selected participants were debriefed about the purpose of the study before conducting semi-structured interview. For data collection interviews had been conducted with the help of demographic sheet, semi-structured interview guide, and audio recording. Demographic sheet was filled with the cooperation of participants. The ten participants for this study were obtained from home settings. Interview’s length ranged from 45 minutes to 1 hour. Interviews were audio recorded with short notes of verbal cues noted on separate blank sheet. All the recorded interviews were transcribed, and were listened variety of time to get real meanings. Later on, themes were generated by using Thematic Analysis to comprehend statements and get meanings.

2.4. Ethical Procedure

The research was conducted while taking all ethical considerations into account. Participants were protected from any possible harm and dealt with respect and dignity. Furthermore, it was best tried to ensure that all participants are fully informed about the rationale and purpose of the study. They were assured about the confidentiality regarding their personal information and their answers on questions.

3. Results

The analysis revealed seven super ordinate themes concerning the “Body weight perception and its psychological influence on women’s health” Psychological issues, Weight Perception and Financial issues. For each of the super ordinate themes, a set of subthemes also emerged (see Table 2).

Table 2: Super Ordinate And Subordinate Themes

Super ordinate themes	Subordinate themes
Psychological issues	Stress
	Anxiety
	Jealousy
	Low confidence
Depression	
Sadness	
Irritable mood	
Mental distress	
	Stigma
Comparison	
Emotional disturbances	
Low self esteem	
Negative evaluation	
Restlessness	
Agitation	
Negative Self Image	
Inferiority complex	



Obsession about weight
Low self-esteem

Weight Perception

Beauty symbol,
Important for Happiness

Sign of Personality
Influence Confidence
Social Acceptance
Key of satisfaction
It influences our social interaction
Strengthens our ability to do house chores
Weight affects our lifestyle

Social Issues

Facing financial issues.

Physical Appearance
Societal Preferences
Rejection
Spending Money
Social Comparison
Criticism
Societal Norms
People comments
Standards
Passing comments
Calling with wrong names

Health Issues

Sickness

Asthma
Fatigue
Weakness
Unhealthy Weight loss Practices
Unhealthy tips
Over intake of green tea

Concern about weight
Diabetes
Pain in Legs
Difficulty in Physical work
Vitamin deficiency
Hormonal issues
Health Negligence
Home remedies for weight loss

mid.

Motivation

Avoidance of healthy food
Joining Gym and left in the

Flexibility towards life
Positive Self-Talk
Efforts of weight loss
Support yourself in society

Healthy life style

Balanced Diet

Exercise

Appetite

Avoiding unhealthy food

Joining community centers

Time management

The interviews were conducted on 10 female participants, who were facing Body Weight Perception issues and its psychological influences on their Health. During this phase of life, they have been through many phases. Based on the interviews conducted, there are major, 07 sub-ordinate and 67 super-ordinate themes developed.

The major themes are as follows:

1. Positive influence of BWP
2. Negative influence of BWP

3.1: Psychological Issues

According to participants, body weight misperception is negatively linked with psychological issues, it promotes many psychological issues including, Anxiety, stress, low self-confidence, low self-esteem, poor self- image, Anger, Stress, Jealousy, Depression, Sadness, Irritable mood, Mental distress, Stigmatization, Comparison, Emotional disturbances, Negative evaluation, Restlessness , Agitation, Psychogenic Pain, Inferiority complex, Obsession about weight, Low self-esteem, Fear of social acceptance, Psychological Distress which leads towards dissatisfaction.

As participant No 1,2,3,4,6,7,8,9, 10 reported that

1. Psychological stress, low self -esteem and negative self -evaluation caused many psychological issues
2. Psychologically disturbed women may face issues like anger, irritability, disappointment and depression.
3. It may cause psychological and physical effects, which leads to mental tiredness.
4. It causes irritability, stress and mental distress.
5. Mental stress in women's bringing change due to which they start living separate.
7. Initially they don't focus on their weight but as someone passed comments on their weight, since then they stopped taking proper diet which makes them feel mentally worried
8. Then psychological issues get raised which cause lack of confidence.
9. Lack of interest in routine task also reported
10. Generally, women suffered from psychological distress.

Body dissatisfaction was defined by (Hill and Latzman, 2013) as "the negative evaluation of one's physical appearance; specially, the discrepancy between ideal and perceived body size and shape.

3.2: Weight Perception

Participants reported that positive perception about weight among women is a symbol of beauty, they perceive themselves more beautiful. It effects their personality traits, increased their happiness, builds self-confidence, they consider themselves socially acceptable. Weight perception also strengthens ability to do house chores and to focus on their healthy lifestyles. According to Bandura (1997) social cognitive theory suggested that, self- appraisal information, people's thought patterns, emotions, motivation, and behavior these are mediated through the cognitive mechanism of self-efficacy. Bandura (1997) believed that people develop their beliefs that through four elementary bases of information which are performance accomplishments, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological states.

Personality traits play an important role in physical self-perception (Fisher & Cleveland, 1958). Previous studies explored that major personality dimensions (neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness) relate to body image (Allen & Walter, 2016) and found that men and women with higher levels of neuroticism, and lower levels of extraversion and conscientiousness, hold more negative perceptions of their body. Women used to stay home as compared to men, get easily influenced from weight perception. As participant No 3,4, and 5 reported that

3. As physical health is very important specially for women to maintain their body weight because it leads towards stress. A person should take health diet and exercise for balanced weight.

4. Our society don't like obese people. More the person is obese, the more he/she will be disliked by society because obesity is the sign of ugliness.

5. Every person has a different body weight, few are smart, few are obese.

3.3: Social Issues

Participants described that body weight insight is also associated with social issues of women, however, varies from person to person. Women give too much attention to physical appearance and to gain social acceptance. "Although body weight issues have become social problems because in many cases, people consider weight a personal problem," adds co-editor Donna Maurer, a sociologist and a John S. Knight postdoctoral fellow in the Writing Program at Cornell. Participants with weight issues experienced negative verbal commentaries, calling out with wrong names, teasing or physical assault. Additionally, subtle behavioral slights such as, eye rolling and totting frequently occurred to them. Comments such as positive and/or negative comments is linked with body satisfaction, self-esteem and depressive symptoms in the expected direction.

In light of social comparison theory body image, people evaluate themselves on basis of comparison to others. Research studies indicated that body dissatisfaction of both men and women remain high after viewing same sex models. As participant No 6,8, 9 and 10 reported that

6. If a woman is smart, everyone considered her good. But she looks little fatty, people started jeered her which causes social withdrawal.

8. With regard to marriage proposals, people mostly prefer the physical structure of women which also affects her social life

9. Society doesn't like fatty and obese people

10. Women are conscious about their weight because every woman desired to look pretty.

3.4: Health Issues

Participants reported that women body misperception about weight negatively affect their health that leads to many health issues, including Sickness, Asthma, Fatigue, Weakness, Nail biting, Concern about weight, Fatigue, Diabetes, Pain in Legs, Difficulty in Physical functioning, Vitamin deficiency, Hormonal issues and Health Negligence. Researches indicated that some of the co-morbidities related to overweight and obesity include breast cancers, endometrial, prostate, ovarian, colorectal, esophageal, kidney issues, pancreatic problems, Type 2 diabetes, hypertension, stroke, Coronary Artery Disease, Congestive Heart Failure, asthma, chronic back pain, osteoarthritis, pulmonary embolism, gallbladder disease, and also an increased risk of disability (Guh et al.,2009). Per annum, all these leads to more than three million deaths worldwide (Kelishadi ,2007). As participant No 4,7, and 9 reported that

4. Overweight causes breathing issues like choking

7. Excessive weight create hurdles in daily life routine and cause difficulty in breathing and pain in legs.

9. Excessive weight causes difficulty in walking, feeling of fatigue, tiredness and hypersomnia.

3:5: Unhealthy Weight loss Practices

Participants reported that they were involved in unhealthy weight loss practices like green tea over intake. They charted unhealthy weight loss tips with no knowledge of the consequence which had negative effect over their body and health. They stated that there was no consistency in their routine they use to join gym and left in the mid because of which they face many muscular problems. They said that they did all this because they were just obsessed to lose weight. The Canadian weight-loss industry is a multimillion-dollar juggernaut, suggests that many people who are willing to waive the inherent risks of using non-evidence-informed products usually look for “magic bullet” methods. (Euromonitor, 2014). As participant No 3,7 and 8 reported that

3.To maintain body weight, women’s use some home-made remedies like drinking hot water with feruled seeds in early morning.

7. Women’s use some home-made remedies to reduce their body weight and also visit some quacks to maintain their weight.

8. As women uses remedies like drinking hot water, including lemon, vinegar acid and green tea.

3:6: Motivation

Participants reported that body weight perception is positively linked with motivation, it promotes motivation in women including flexibility towards life, positive Self-Talk, efforts of weight loss, satisfied after dieting, well dress up, good manners. Self- talk can be defined as, statements addressed to the self, multidimensional in nature. It is a mental package that enhances and build individual self- confidence. (Hardy, 2006). Positive body perception enhances our satisfaction, people used to become satisfied from weight and related things. It promotes positive attitude towards self and others. As participant No 1 and 2 reported that

1.Smartness motivates us, as like everyone we also want to look smart as it is admired by people.

2. Good dressing makes people feels good and admired by people.

3:7: Healthy Life Style

Participants reported that body perception is also positively linked with healthy life style, it promotes balanced diet, enhances exercise and walk routines, influences healthy food intake such as fruits, vegetables, improves sleep hygiene and time management skills among women. It also helps in avoiding unhealthy food. (Grimaldo, 2010) term healthy lifestyle such as sports, food intake, good sleep and rest, is a way of life based on the interaction between living conditions and individual patterns of behavior determined by socio-cultural and personal features.

A study conducted on the association between body satisfaction and healthy lifestyle behaviors which revealed that extra fulfillment is correlated with higher score of health promoting life style.

As participant No 1, 2 and 4 reported that

1. According to Islam vale is necessary for women’s, also a complete dressing that includes shalwar kameez is necessary but some societies don’t allow

2. People should adopt the lifestyle according to their society in which they are living.

4. Women should adapt health life styles that includes organized sleeping patterns and health eating habits, that helps to maintain their weight.

Discussion

The persistence of the study remained to investigate the association among actual body weight, estimated body mass index, the accuracy of weight status perception and its psychological influences on female's mental health. Females overestimated their body weight and were engaged in weight loss activities. Body weight perception tends to be inaccurate when compared to BMI. Marked differences were detected between BMI and weight perception. Out of 10 participants, 8 inaccurately perceived their weight. Approximately half of the normal weight females perceived themselves as weighty and they unnecessarily attempt to reduce weight to meet their inaccurate normal standards. The outcome of this study indicates that all the females were tangled in weight control practices. Females are likely to diet and engage in unhealthy weight-loss practices according to research (Cheung et al.,2007). The most commonly adopted behaviors to lose weight were exercise, taking fruits and vegetables, and reduction of taking fats. Skipping meal, fasting and engaging in unhealthy weight loss approaches such as green tea over intake, were also reported by all of the females.

The study indicated that Females who perceived themselves as overweight face many psychological problems such as Anxiety, stress, low self-confidence, low self-esteem, poor self-image, Anger, Stress, Jealousy, Depression, Sadness, Irritable mood, Mental distress, Stigmatization, Comparison, Emotional disturbances, Negative evaluation, Restlessness , Agitation, Psychogenic Pain, Inferiority complex, Obsession about weight, Low self-esteem, Fear of social acceptance, Psychological Distress which lead them towards dissatisfaction.

Weight loss is typically associated with improvements in body image. If we see the positive side of the study, it also indicated that body weight perception is positively linked with motivation, women who perceive themselves as overweight also showed high level of motivation to lose weight. They adapted positive Self-Talk and were satisfied after dieting. Self-talk can be defined as, statements talked to the self, multidimensional in nature, (Hardy, 2006). Self-talk is a mental package that enhances individual confidence and build self-confidence. Positive body perception enhances our satisfaction, people used to become satisfied from weight and related things. It promotes positive attitude towards self and others.

Implications

The study will help to generate awareness in society about actual body weight according to BMI and its perception influence on women psychological health. Our study is unique due to our body weight perception and its influences on women psychological health. This study opens the new aspects to analysis or interprets the perception about BWP and actual body weight according to MBI.

Conclusion

The results of the study demonstrates that body weight perception was poorly linked by BMI amongst females and inaccurate weight perception had negative influence on women's psychological as well as physical health. Females overvalued their body weight and were involved in weight loss activities. In light of the high occurrence of body weight misunderstanding exists among females and the fact that body weight discernment encourages weight control behaviors, promotion of healthy body image perception and healthy eating should be endorsed in society by health organizations, psychologist and nutritionist. Since the role of media is important in influencing body weight perception, media can be used to develop healthy practices. That study will bring awareness among women who consider themselves overweight without checking their BMI.

Limitations

One key limitation in this study is sample size was not the demonstrative of entirely females. It would have been better if the study was quantitative. The study was quite time consuming. In addition, socioeconomic status (SES) of the participants was not measured. Future studies should consider this later as it influences body image and weight control practices. In that study women of age 25-35 were only selected, in future studies body perception of men age 25-35 years old needs to be explored.

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