



# ADOLESCENTS' PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS BODY IMAGE DISSATISFACTION AND COMORBIDITY: A QUALITATIVE META- ANALYSIS

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## Abstract

Adolescence is a period of transition between life as a child and life as an adult. One of the major concerns and aspects that is quite well-researched is body image among adolescents, but continues to have many research gaps as the inclusion of various factors aren't included or proven in research studies. The main aim of this meta-analysis paper is to understand the researches done in the past on body image, perceptions and attitudes of adolescents towards their body image which leads to dissatisfaction, understanding the comorbid circumstances with body image that adolescents undergo and experience, and to understand the research gaps amongst the main concerns. This paper includes 34 researches which were conducted on various themes pertaining to the prevalence of body image, comorbid symptoms and distorted perceptions of body image among adolescents. The analysis of the 34 researches revealed great heterogeneity across the different studies that were included in the analysis. Out of the 34 researches that were included, 11 of them are Indian researches in order to highlight the cultural aspect of these sensitive concerns as well. It is indeed evident that India has also become quite prevalent in popularizing and publicizing body image concerns among both, children and adolescents which not only have proved to influence their identity but also the process of development in other aspects. Although, there were perceptual evaluations and due to the enhanced sensitivity of the concern, most researches cannot be generalized to an entire population, since there are always individual differences. It can be conferred and suggested that more researches on body image involving researches from different parts of the world is also recommended to highlight the cultural aspect and enhance the level of understanding in terms of adolescents' perceptions as well as the socio-cultural influences in the identity formation of the child.

**Keywords:** Adolescents, Prevalence, Body Image, Body Image Dissatisfaction, Comorbidity

## 1. Introduction

According to (Feldman, 2011), adolescence is the developmental stage between childhood and adulthood. It is a period of transition between life as a child and life as an adult. Although, puberty is universal, there are several factors which make the experience for an individual to be as subjective. Biologically, entering into the stage of adolescence, can be marked as the onset of puberty but this is dependent on several factors such as culture, family, life experiences, environment, peers, etc. Socially, there are several aspects to focus on an adolescent child, which involves increasing independence from their parents, selectively attentive and focussing on the peer group, experiencing mood swings, family conflicts, and risky or reckless behaviours. One of the major concerns and aspects that is quite well- researched is body image among adolescents, but continues to have many research gaps as the inclusion of various factors aren't included or proven in research studies.

Body Image has always been a widely trending research topic among adolescents and adults, as it involves a variety of perspectives with respect to gender, socio-economic status, prevalence of the issue in different cultures, as well as perceptions of individuals and the extent to which they relate with the same. However, among the repertoire of studies conducted on Body Image, not only pertaining to a particular country or culture, but the global perspective of understanding the gravity of the concern, there have also been researches which have exhausted the definition and meaning of body image, trying to bridge the massive gap of individual differences in research. There have been researches which aim at investigating the prevalence of Body Image in India.

The main aim of this meta-analysis is to understand the researches done in the past on body image, perceptions and attitudes of adolescents towards their body image which leads to dissatisfaction, understanding the comorbid circumstances with body image that adolescents undergo and experience, and to understand the research gaps amongst the main concerns. This paper includes 34 researches which were conducted on various themes pertaining to the prevalence of body image, comorbid symptoms and distorted perceptions of body image among adolescents. Out of the 34 researches that were included, 11 of them are Indian researches in order to highlight the cultural aspect of these sensitive concerns as well.

## 2. Body Image

Among the 34 empirical researches conducted on the adolescent population, 12 pertain to the different perceptions and prevalence of Body Image concerns in India as well as other parts of the world; 15 pertain to the influences of Body Image Dissatisfaction and the concerning aspects of the same among adolescent population; and 7 researches associate with comorbid symptoms that occur along with body image concerns and body image dissatisfaction.

## 2.1 Perception and Prevalence of Body Image

(Ganesan, Ravishankar, & Ramalingam, 2018, pp. 42-46) and (Yadav, 2017, pp. 588-594) aimed at understanding the proportion of girls that are dissatisfied with their bodies and the different aspects that affect their extent of dissatisfaction and also how this perception of their positive or negative body image plays an important role in an individual's identity. Although, the prevalence of these sensitive issues has been increasing at a fast-growing pace in India, there have been a range of studies conducted on Indian adolescents to understand individual perceptions of body image. Recently, (Deshmukh & Kulkarni, 2017, pp. 1025-1029) and (Rashmi, Patil, Angadi, & Pattankar, 2016, pp. 1-13) had similar themes in their cross-sectional researches as they aimed at assessing the perceptions of body image and the satisfaction of their respective study participants by evaluating their Body Mass Index. The attitudes towards their body weight and shape were also examined and determined by the methods they used to alter their weight. In 2012, (Pauline, Selvam, Swaminathan, & Vaz, pp. 2348-2356) and (Shah, Shaikh, & Singh, pp. 344-347) examined the association of gender differences and the socio-economic status of individuals with their perceptions towards body image. The awareness of everyone about body image was also examined and it was found that underweight children were more likely to over-estimate their weight status and overweight children were more likely to under-estimate it. Along the same theme, (Dixit, Agarwal, Singh, Kant, & Singh, 2011, pp. 197-202) highlighted the prevalence and perceptions of adolescents in the Indian population in their cross-sectional study as well. It had become evident that the desire to become thin was higher in adolescent girls, even the girls who had perceived their bodies to be too thin which in turn implied that there are cognitive distortions with respect to adolescent's body image and it may well affect their identities as they develop both mentally and physically.

In the worldly context, there have also been non-Indian research studies which focus on highlighting the perception that adolescents have in the western populations. Recently in 2019, (Winter, Jones, & O'Neill, pp. 230-238), (Himmelstein, Puhl, & Watson) and (Kelly, Zilanawalla, Booker, & Sacker, pp. 59-68) shared the same themes of investigating the perception of adolescents by including social bullying, eating breakfast with family and social media factors to help understand the difference of attitudes towards their body perception. They found that social bullying in school settings and excessive use of social media led to sleeplessness, change in eating habits and eventually affected their body image as well. (Glashouwer, Neimeijer, de Koning, Vestjens, & Martijn, 2018) also examined the body image of adolescents with an eating disorder by introducing a computer-based intervention which resulted in no significant portrayal of positive effects on the implicit associations regarding self-attractiveness. In 2013, (Stanley, pp. 1-139) examined how young women perceived their body and made sense of their body image in a college environment. The researches from the worldly highlighted the socio-economic status and the influence of environmental conditions on the attitudes of body image of adolescents in different settings.

## 2.2 Body Image Dissatisfaction

Since there are multiple causes that alter body image of individuals, especially adolescents, there are also a variety of influences which result in distorted thinking and dissatisfaction pertaining to one's body. As the prevalence of body image concerns have been well identified in India, there are several researches which move along the theme of how dissatisfied or satisfied Indian adolescents are with their bodies. In 2019, (Posavac & Posavac), (Sarwari) and (Feldman) focussed their interviews and research studies on headlining the importance of societal norms and social media on the body image among individuals, regardless of their age. In an interview with Mina Gerges, an Egyptian Gay Model, elaborately describes how the modelling industry has politicized individuals' bodies in several ways, allowing them to feel dissatisfied through rejections in careers and the massive cultural shift. Along with the influence of social media, Rachel Rogers, an Applied Psychology Professor discussed the detrimental factors of seeing 'idealized' and 'unrealistic' images with respect to body image and mental health. (Gillen & Markey, 2018) and (Latiff, MMed, & MMed, 2018, pp. 34-41) conducted researches on determining the link between sexual well-being and body image using the BMI of participants. They also found that higher the body satisfaction and body appreciation led to positive sexual experiences and vice-versa in adolescents and primary school children as well. to (Bearman & Stice, 2008; 2011, p. 2) also contributed to the findings that body image dissatisfaction can predict depression, along with (Xu, et al., 2010, pp. 156-164) and (Goldfield, et al., 2010, pp. 1746-1761) who found that there was a clear distinctive classification of body image and differential weights. Due to engaging in different weight change behaviours and the socio-cultural pressures, obese youth had reported to have higher body dissatisfaction than overweight youth who had more body dissatisfaction than normal weight youth.

The prevalence of body image in India has been rising and has become ubiquitous and accustomed and accordingly, several researches done in India and on Indian population, that contain the themes of body image dissatisfaction have been gaining popularity lately. To understand the perceptions of women about their body image, in 2019, research study by (Ariel-Donges, Gordon, Bauman, & Perri, pp. 41-51) and a survey conducted by (Fortis Healthcare), focussed on understanding how Yoga and the commonality of body shaming was influencing body image of women. The study founded that the participants in the yoga condition also reported larger reductions in the amount of time and energy spent preoccupied with their appearance. However, the survey founded that 90% women recognized that body shaming is a common behaviour, 84% participants reported that women tend to experience more body shaming as compared to men and 47.5% women reported having experienced body shaming at their school or work place. (Sharma, Ola, & Sharma, 2018, pp. 796-978) and (Bortamuly, 2017) also conducted studies which included the internalization of culture and correlation between body image satisfaction and self-esteem. However, it was evident that females had greater body image satisfaction and self-esteem than men. Also, (Pallan, Hiam, Duda, & Adab, 2011) and (Goswami, Sachdeva, & Sachdeva, 2012, pp. 168-172) researched on the similar themes involving the awareness of body size, and the magnitude of students with a low weight who had a higher level of body image satisfaction as compared to overweight students. It was also inferred that there is an increase in body image dissatisfaction with higher weight status adolescents.



### 2.3 Body Image and Comorbidity

Comorbidity may sometimes not be the main focus of researches on body image dissatisfaction especially in adolescents since, the transitioning age may highlight the feelings and emotions that need to be addressed primarily. Clinical diagnosis of disorders may however come later only if the persistent feelings and thoughts of dissatisfaction may not be addressed. Also, since comorbidity can have different meanings, giving rise to a repertoire of illnesses, the meta analysis has included three main themes, pertaining to the illnesses experienced along with body image dissatisfaction. (Claytor, Kochar, Kappelman, & Martin, 2018, p. 6) studied on the association of body image dissatisfaction with paediatric inflammatory bowel disease. It was perceived that paediatric patients with inflammatory bowel diseases are at a very high risk for poor psychosocial outcomes, which includes body image dissatisfaction. It was also inferred that risk factors for body image dissatisfaction included female gender, older age at diagnosis, active disease, current steroid use, higher body mass index, and comorbid mood disorder which influenced the body image of children and adolescents increasingly. (da Silva P, et al., 2018, p. 790) and (Flores-Cornejo, Kamego-Tome, Zapata-Pachas, & Alvarado, 2017, pp. 316–322) conducted research studies which included examining and determining the associations of poor self-rated health and use of tobacco and alcohol with body image dissatisfaction among adolescents. They found that insufficient physical activity and the use of alcohol and tobacco played an important role in determining body image dissatisfaction since it also led to unhealthy eating habits and cognitive distortions about one's health.

Another theme that researches addressed in comorbidity of body image included researches which (Moreira & Batista, 2007, pp. 130-131) and (MacNeill, Best, & Davis, 2017, pp. 1-9) focussed on, gender differences and personality influences on body image dissatisfaction. They found that body image dissatisfaction in obese women is more related to be present with binge eating disorder than to weight excess and females reported more body dissatisfaction and disordered eating than males. However, it was also inferred that personality traits like high neuroticism and low conscientiousness was significantly contributed to the prediction of body image dissatisfaction in males. Understanding symptoms of various mental illnesses along with negative attitudes of body image also played a major role. (Ruffolo, Phillips, Menard, Fay, & Weisberg, 2006, pp. 11-19) and (Rosenstrom, et al., 2013, pp. 253-260) based their study along the same themes of depressive symptoms in Body Dysmorphic Disorder. However, they found that there were no significant group differences in body dysmorphic disorder symptoms severity, delusionality, or suicide ideation or attempts and it was also conferred that the dysfunctional attitudes towards oneself represented a significantly important target for cognitive therapies and preventive interventions.

### 3. Research Methodology

#### 3.1 Sources of Data

For this study, secondary data was collected through online journals and databases such as Google Scholar, PubMed, Wiley Handbooks, etc. This paper includes 34 researches which were conducted on various themes pertaining to the prevalence of body image, comorbid symptoms and distorted perceptions of body image among adolescents. The analysis of the 34 researches revealed great heterogeneity across the different studies that were included in the analysis. Out of the 34 researches that were included, 11 of them are Indian researches in order to highlight the cultural aspect of these sensitive concerns as well. It is indeed evident that India has also become quite prevalent in popularizing and publicizing body image concerns among both, children and adolescents which not only have proved to influence their identity but also the process of development in other aspects.

#### 3.2 Analysis of Data

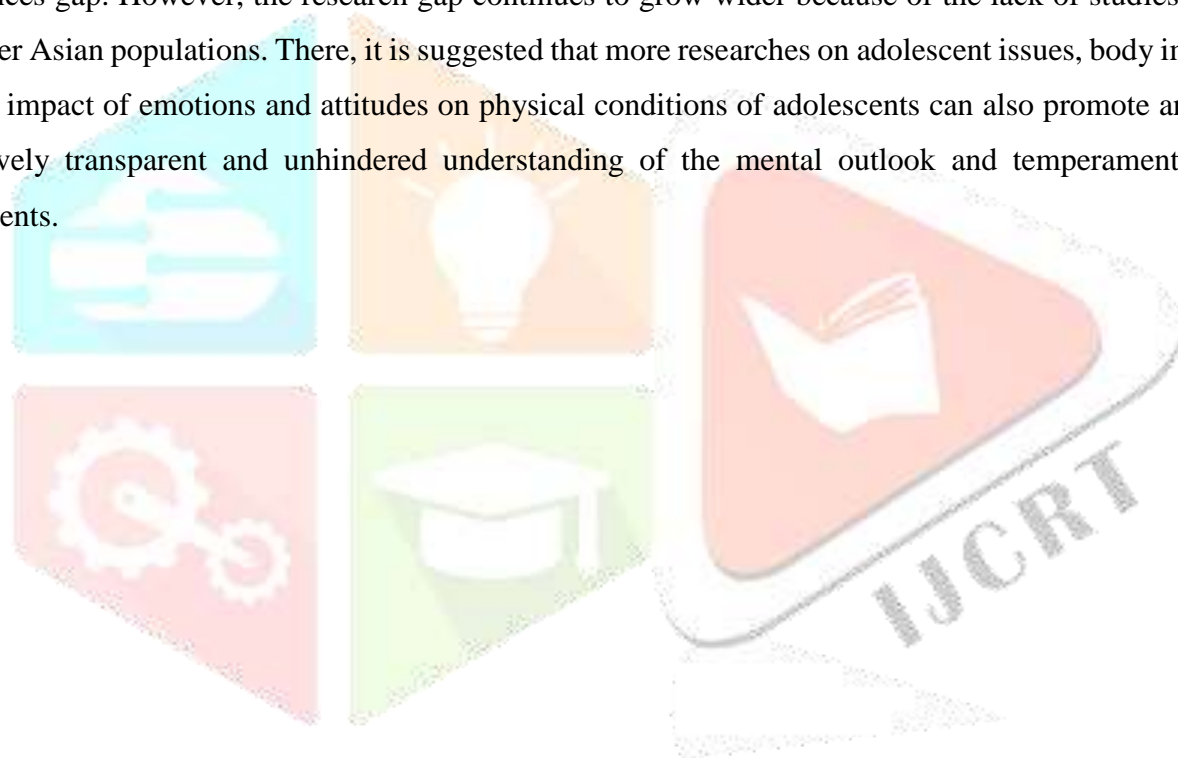
The analysis of data has been conducted through a thematic analysis which is a qualitative meta-analysis method. The themes that have emerged from this study and analysis have been elaborately mentioned above with respect to body image in the form of the prevalence of body image, body image dissatisfaction and comorbidity effects on adolescents.

### 4. Discussion

The analysis of the 34 researches revealed great heterogeneity across the different studies that were included in the paper. Although, there were perceptual evaluations and due to the enhanced sensitivity of the concern, most researches cannot be generalized to an entire population, since there are always individual differences. From the analysis of the above researches done in the subjects of body image perception, body image dissatisfaction and body image and comorbidity. Due to the conglomeration and the discrepancy in the various themes which pertain to body image, it is rather difficult to accumulate and combine most of the themes under the same concern. Socio-cultural factors, gender, and other personality influences have also been taken into considerations in this paper. On the other hand, it is indeed evident that India has also become quite prevalent in popularizing and publicizing body image concerns among both, children and adolescents which not only have proved to influence their identity but also the process of development in other aspects. Since, most diseases have proven to be psychosomatic today, comorbidity among these symptoms not only cause or result in body image dissatisfaction, but also can act as a catalyst for other physical illnesses like eating disorders. However, more researches on body image involving researches from different parts of the world is also recommended to highlight the cultural aspect and enhance the level of understanding in terms of adolescents' perceptions as well as the socio-cultural influences in the identity formation of the child.

## 5. Implications and Suggestions

There are only a few studies focussing on the preponderance and the popularity of adolescent related issues especially body image which has many influences, there are however many studies which focus barely on the attitudes of adolescents towards these issues as well. In order to understand the impact that body image and attitudes have on physical health, studies pertaining to body image and comorbidity was also included to highlight the importance of the research gaps in these aspects. It can be conferred and inferred from the analysis that more researches conducted on different populations with respect to a repertoire of cultures and traditions will help clarify an expansive perspective and define the prevalence of body image and related concerns in the world. Since, the biggest research gap in psychological research is bridging the gap of individual differences, in different aspects, the above researches that are involved in the paper have also done a commendable job in bridging the individual differences gap. However, the research gap continues to grow wider because of the lack of studies done in India and other Asian populations. There, it is suggested that more researches on adolescent issues, body image concerns and the impact of emotions and attitudes on physical conditions of adolescents can also promote and enhance an extensively transparent and unhindered understanding of the mental outlook and temperaments of different adolescents.



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