



Research Paper: The Relationship Between Body Image Satisfaction and Feeding and Eating problems Among Female University Students



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Abstract

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Objective: Feeding and eating disorders, a relatively common psychiatric disorder primarily observed in late adolescence and young adulthood, are characterized by abnormal eating patterns and cognitive distortions related to food and weight. Feeding and eating disorders are one of the most critical issues that individuals, especially youth and adolescents, grapple with today. The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between body image satisfaction and feeding and eating problems in female students at Islamic Azad University, Lahijan Branch.

Methods: This study employed a descriptive correlational design. The population of the study consisted of female students at Islamic Azad University, Lahijan Branch, during the academic year 2023-2024, from whom 348 were selected using convenience sampling. Research data were collected using the Eating Attitude Test (EAT-26) and the Satisfaction with Body-Image (SWBI) Questionnaire. Data analysis was performed using Pearson's correlation coefficient and SPSS version 27 software at a significance level of 0.05.

Results: The results showed a negative relationship between body image satisfaction and feeding and eating problems ($r = -0.72$, $P < 0.01$).

Conclusion: Based on the findings, it can be concluded that body image satisfaction leads to a reduction in feeding and eating problems.

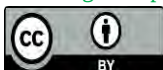
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1. Introduction

Feeding and eating disorders are a concerning factor in public health, with rates rapidly increasing since the 1970s (Ebrahimzadeh Mousavi & Aminoroaya, 2018). The most common eating disorders seen in students are anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa. Anorexia nervosa is defined by a fear of weight gain and a disturbance in the perception of body image. In contrast, bulimia nervosa is characterized by persistent concern about shape and weight, recurrent episodes of binge eating, lack of control during these binges, and the use of compensatory methods to prevent weight gain, such as purging, dietary restriction, fasting, or excessive exercise (McLean et al., 2016). The prevalence of feeding and eating disorders and related problems, such as low self-esteem, sadness, malaise, and low satisfaction with body image, has increased significantly in the last 30 years and continues to rise (McLean et al., 2016).

Body Image Concern is a reflection of the mind that a person creates of themselves, which may or may not be related to how others perceive them. Body image is subject to various distortions from early experiences, parental attitudes, internal elements such as emotions and moods, and other factors. A person's body image strongly influences their behavior. This mental image is a driving factor in feeding and eating disorders, as well as mental illnesses such as severe anxiety and even depression. Body image is an aspect of self-concept. In other words, body image is a representation of a person's external appearance, which encompasses physical, perceptual, and attitudinal dimensions of the

individual (Taft Ashian S & Ghasemi Nejad Dhkordi, 2023). Many theorists attribute the increase in feeding and eating disorders in recent years to the emphasis on thinness and its valorization in Western societies through widespread media and social networks. Prospective studies in students have shown that weight concerns, distorted body image, and depression are each a risk for the development of feeding and eating disorders, which are amplified by social networks (Najjarnasab & Dashbozorg, 2019).

Dissatisfaction with body image is a good predictor of the likelihood of developing an eating disorder in longitudinal studies. In fact, one of the necessary precursors to the development of an eating disorder is dissatisfaction with body image. Individuals with a negative body image are more likely to develop an eating disorder and suffer more from feelings such as depression, loneliness, isolation, low self-esteem, and obsession with weight loss. Therefore, the mental dissatisfaction created leads individuals with normal weight to diet, and this is associated with unconventional and unhealthy weight loss methods, eating restrictions, feeding and eating disorders, depression, and low self-esteem. Similarly, each of these disorders, due to its accompanying characteristics, creates significant complications, especially in terms of malnutrition and threats to public health for those who are affected. Considering that the age of onset of this disorder is adolescence and early adulthood, and its coincidence with the beginning of social activities and individual productivity, the importance of the issue is doubled (Sholeha, 2014).

Body appreciation refers to valuing the body's characteristics, functions, and health, such as positive regard, acceptance, respect, and support for the body. This occurs through rejecting unrealistic body images portrayed in the media (Avalos et al., 2005). The results of various studies have shown that body appreciation is associated with a wide range of positive indicators, including self-esteem, self-compassion, and sexual satisfaction (Linardon et al., 2022), life satisfaction, controlled diet (Piko et al., 2020), and a flexible eating pattern (Baceviciene & Jankauskiene, 2020), which is negatively associated with feeding and eating disorders. Correspondingly, the results of some studies have shown that people with high levels of body appreciation have more health-promoting behaviors and pay serious attention to the body's needs and focus on body functions and health (Nolen & Panisch, 2022).

In this regard, numerous studies have examined the relationship between body image satisfaction and feeding and eating disorders. In his study, Mashalpourfard (2018) finds that there is a relationship between feeding and eating disorders and body image perception. Hogue and Mills (2019) claim that there is a positive relationship between the use of social networks and negative perception of self-image, such that communication with attractive peers in these networks increases fear of body image. Lioryd-Richardson et al. (2022) find that there is a correlation between negative self-image, low self-esteem, and general dissatisfaction with life, and this affects the correct perception of weight.

Considering that the school period is a critical period for promoting healthy eating behavior, because eating behaviors are established for a fixed period of adulthood in this period (Sholeha, 2014); on the other hand, due to faster growth and development in youth than in other periods, nutritional needs and nutrient intake in this period are important for growth, development, and health; that is to say, in developing countries, nutrition and cultural transmission, social developments, Westernization, family environment, exposure to mass and social media, and globalization all have a significant impact on eating attitudes and behaviors, especially among adolescents and young people (Golpour & Zakipour, 2023); this research aims to examine the relationship between body image satisfaction and feeding and eating problems in female students.

2. Methods

This study had a descriptive correlational design. The statistical population of the study included female students of Islamic Azad University, Lahijan Branch, who were studying during the academic year 2023-2024. Through the convenience sampling method and based on Morgan's table, 384 individuals were selected, and the Eating Attitude Test (EAT-26) and the Body Image Satisfaction Questionnaire (SWBI) were administered to them. Data were analyzed using Pearson's correlation statistical method by SPSS-27 software at a significance level of 0.05.

2.1. Instruments

The Eating Attitudes Test (EAT-26): The Eating Attitudes Test (EAT-26) was designed by [Garner & Garfinkel \(1979\)](#) and is a self-report screening tool for pathological eating attitudes and behaviors. It consists of 26 questions. Questions 1 to 25 are scored on a Likert scale (3 = Always, 2 = Almost Always, 1 = Often, 0 = Sometimes, 0 = Rarely, 0 = Never), and question 26 is scored on a reverse Likert scale (3 = Never, 2 = Rarely, 1 = Sometimes, 0 = Always, 0 = Almost Always, 0 = Often). The minimum and maximum scores for this instrument range from zero to 78. This test has three subscales: 1) Dieting (1, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 14, 16, 17, 22, 23, 24, 25), Bulimia (3, 4, 9, 18, 21, 26), and Oral Control (2, 5, 8, 13, 15, 19, 20). The lowest score an individual can receive is zero, and the highest score is 78. If an individual's score on the test is higher than 20, they should seek further evaluation and possible treatment ([Garner & Garfinkel, 1979](#)). [McLean et al. \(2016\)](#) reported a test-retest reliability coefficient of 0.91 over a two-to-three-week interval and a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of 0.76. In the research of [Mosa Bondak et al. \(2019\)](#), Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to examine the reliability of the questionnaire, and the total scale score was 0.82, and its validity was obtained as 0.86.

Satisfaction With Body-Image (SWBI):

This questionnaire was developed by [Souto & Garcia \(2002\)](#). It consists of 22 items. Each question is scored on a five-point Likert scale (never to always) (5 = always, 4 = almost always, 3 = often, sometimes, rarely = 2, never = 1). This questionnaire has two dimensions: body image satisfaction, which is obtained from the sum of scores on

questions 1-2-4-8, and body image dissatisfaction, which is obtained from the sum of scores on questions 3-5-6-7-9-10-11-12-13-14-15-16-17-18-19-20-21-22. A score between 22 and 44 indicates low body image dissatisfaction. A score between 44 and 66 indicates moderate body image dissatisfaction, and a score above 66 indicates high body image dissatisfaction. In [Souto & Garcia's \(2002\)](#) research, the reliability of the questionnaire was found to be 0.91 using the split-half method. Moreover, content validity was calculated to be 0.79 using the CVR method. In [Taheri Torbati et al.'s \(2014\)](#) research, the reliability of the questionnaire was calculated to be 0.91 using Cronbach's alpha method, and construct validity was assessed by factor analysis using the principal component method with varimax rotation, where KMO was 0.89 and Bartlett's test of sphericity coefficient was 2292.3.

2.2. Procedure

After obtaining permission and referring to Islamic Azad University, Lahijan Branch, the researcher selected 384 female students using convenience sampling and distributed the research questionnaires among them. Participants were asked to sign a consent form, and they were assured that their responses would remain confidential.

3. Results

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between body image satisfaction and feeding and eating problems in female students of Islamic Azad University, Lahijan Branch. 384 students participated in this study. Of these, 79

(20.6%) were associate degree students, 215 (56%) were bachelor's degree students, 79 (20.6%) were master's degree students, and

11 (2.9%) were doctoral students. [Table 1](#) shows the descriptive indices of the research variables.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) of research variables in students (n=384)

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Dieting	18.98	2.78	-0.505	0.384
Overeating	12.69	1.77	0.607	-0.096
Oral Control	11.60	1.78	0.473	-0.531
Body Satisfaction	12.04	0.79	-0.644	0.197
Body Dissatisfaction	.26.16	3.79	0.598	0.213
Feeding and Eating Problems	26.39	8.19	-0.494	-0.684
Body Image Satisfaction	28.92	6.06	0.308	-1.302

According to [Table 1](#), the dependent variable, feeding and eating problems, had a mean of 26.39 and a standard deviation of 8.19. The independent variable, body image satisfaction, had a mean of 28.92 and a standard deviation of 6.06.

[Table 2](#) shows the information related to the Pearson correlation between the research variables.

Table 2

The correlation matrix of the research variables.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Body Image Satisfaction	1						
Feeding and Eating Problems	-0.72**	1					
Body Dissatisfaction	-0.48**	0.53*	1				
Body Satisfaction	0.43**	-0.71*	-0.38*	1			
Oral restraint	-0.44**	0.59**	0.49**	-0.57**	1		
Binge Eating	-0.74**	0.55**	0.65*	-0.39**	0.46*	1	
Dieting	-0.76**	0.47*	0.61**	-0.73*	0.61*	0.46*	1

According to the results of the correlation matrix, there was a negative relationship between body image satisfaction and feeding and eating problems ($r = -0.72$, $P < 0.01$). There was a negative relationship between body image satisfaction and body dissatisfaction ($r = -0.48$, $P < 0.01$). There was a positive relationship between body image satisfaction and body satisfaction ($r = 0.43$, $P < 0.01$). There was a negative relationship between body image satisfaction and oral restraint ($r = -0.44$, $P < 0.01$). There is a negative relationship between body image satisfaction and overeating ($r = -0.74$, $P < 0.01$). There was a negative relationship between body image satisfaction and dieting ($r = -0.76$, $P < 0.01$).

4. Discussion

The results of the study showed that there was a relationship between body image satisfaction and feeding and eating problems. These results are consistent with the results of Ebrahimzadeh Mousavi & Aminoroaya (2018), Mashalpourfard (2018), Najjarnasab & Dashbozorg (2019), Pourjaberi & DashtBozorgi (2019), Golpour & Zakipour (2023), Keel et al. (2013), Lloyd-Richardson et al. (2022), Hogue & Mills (2019).

In explaining the obtained result, it can be said that feeding and eating problems are complex mental illnesses resulting from genetics and environmental factors, among which negative body image is only one of these factors; however, negative body image is prominent in feeding and eating problems because many people with eating disorders place a high value on their body and weight when determining their worth. This

Overvaluation of body shape and weight is considered a key symptom in certain, but not all, eating disorders. A person's self-evaluation, which is disproportionately influenced by body weight and shape, is consistent with a diagnosis of anorexia nervosa or bulimia nervosa (Veisi et al., 2021).

Considering the views of different cultures on the appearance of individuals, concern about body image is more common among individuals, especially among women, and causes many problems, including dissatisfaction with physical appearance and even a negative view of physical appearance, and people with this negative evaluation tend to approximate themselves to an ideal image of the body (Khanzadeh et al., 2024).

In fact, the views of different cultures regarding individuals' bodies and beauty ideals increase concerns about body image and cause many problems, including dissatisfaction with physical appearance and even a negative view of physical bodies. Such individuals develop a negative self-evaluation and tend to compare themselves with the ideal body image, attempting to use various methods, including exercise and physical activity, to achieve this. Consequently, they are more prone to displaying signs of feeding and eating problems, such as weight loss, a persistent desire and effort to lose weight, a morbid fear of gaining weight, and compensatory behaviors following overeating to prevent weight gain (SeyyedSalehi & DashtBozorgi, 2018). Since body image is a two-

dimensional construct with physical perception and mental attitude, physical appearance is the main part of body image that plays an important role in social interactions (Novitasari & Hamid, 2021). On the other hand, body image concern means a negative mental evaluation of the body as an influential factor associated with higher negative affect, such as distress, and many unhealthy weight-related consequences (Waller & Mountford, 2015). Inappropriate and negative perceptions of body shape can lead to excessive investment in body image, which is associated with harmful psychosocial consequences such as anxiety, depression, poor self-worth, and efficacy (Kinsaul et al., 2014). These results can be interpreted as a significant gap between the perception of the real body image and the desired body image placing an individual in a passive position that generates negative and exaggerated beliefs about physical defects and intense concern about negative evaluation by others and fear of weight stigma, which results in the emergence of negative emotions, lack of control over eating, and weak feelings of self-efficacy (Alipour et al., 2024).

This research was conducted on female students at Islamic Azad University, Lahijan Branch. Caution should be exercised in generalizing the results to other individuals and groups. It is suggested that similar research be conducted on other groups in the future. Given the relationship between body image satisfaction and feeding and eating problems, it is recommended that training courses be held for students to make them aware of the strategies to increase self-

confidence and positive attitudes towards themselves, and the grounds for the occurrence of feeding and eating problems be prevented.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between body image satisfaction and feeding and eating problems in female students. The results showed that there was a negative relationship between body image satisfaction and feeding and eating problems. Therefore, it can be concluded that body image satisfaction can predict the extent of feeding and eating problems in students.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in the writing of this article.

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