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Effect of regular physical activity upon body image concerning female collegiate students

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Abstract

Importance of body image has been very well documented in the research literature. For girls and females, a positive body image ensures physical and mental health. This study compares the body image of female collegiate students based on their participation in regular physical activity. This study was carried out on 30 female college students engaged in regular physical activity (Average age 19.11 years) and 30 female college students with no active involvement in physical activity (Average age 20.78 years). In the present study activities such as cycling, walking, exercise, yoga was considered to be a physical activity. The sample were students of various higher education colleges operational in Nagpur city. Modified Version of Self Assessment Questionnaire for Body Image, prepared by Agashe and Karkare (2008) was used for assessment of body image. Results reveal the significant beneficial impact of regular physical activity on the body image of female collegiate students. The results were discussed with well-established theories describing the physical exercise and its role in body image.

Keywords: Physical activity, body image, female students

Introduction

Images in media project somewhat unrealistic yardstick in describing feminine beauty. Mass media portray thinness as an essential element in feminine beauty. Dittmar and Howard (2004)^[4] stated that advertisement in print and electronic media portray ideal women as tall, fair and thin. The images of females are aplenty in media making tall claims that this is the ideal image of a woman. According to Cash and Pruzinsky (2004)^[3], body image is a complex construct constituting the following configuration: emotional experience related to the body and its functions, as well as mental concept regarding physical appearance. Body image is the perception that a person has of their physical self, but more importantly the thoughts and feelings the person experiences as a result of that perception. It is important to understand that these feelings can be positive, negative or a combination of both and are influenced by individual and environmental factors. There are mainly four aspects of body image. These are perceptual body image, affective body image, cognitive body image and behavioural body image. The distorted body image in female can be seen in every age group (Tiggemann & Slater, 2004)^[14]. Females are physically less dissatisfied by their physical appearance and this leads to the development of negative body image with women from all age group and body type exhibit body image problems (Striegel-Moore & Franko, 2002)^[13]. Irrespective of body mass people including men and women are more at risk to develop negative body image if they prejudice their beliefs and cognition regarding their physical appearance (Butters and Cash, 1987)^[2].

So many researchers have tried to examine the factors that are associated with body image and physical activity is one of them. Schilder, 1935^[11]; Lerner, 1967^[9] and Drought, 1980^[5] reported that physical activity and movement pattern affect the body image of an individual. It is reported that a dynamic activity promotes positive body image. Schulz (1961) in a study reported that high school girls of good physical fitness were found to have a more positive body image than less fit girls. Eide, R. (1982)^[6] explored the relationship between body image, self-image and physical activity. The study concluded that physical activity can give the individual a more positive attitude to his own body and his self-image, although not all investigations have given uniform results.

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Gwyon (1985) [7] reported that adolescent female dancers having more magnitude of body image as compared to non-dancer female adolescents. Tucker and Maxwell (1992) [15] reported a positive impact of weight training on body image of females. Ahmed *et al.* (2002) [11] reported that after 12 weeks of strength training, participants experienced significantly more strength and improved body image despite a slight increase in % body fat. Hausenblas (2006) [8] in their meta-analysis reported that exercisers had a significant improvement in body image scores following an exercise intervention. They concluded that exercise was associated with improved body image. Contrary to these findings Rote *et al.* (2013) [10] in a cross-sectional study examined the relationships between lifestyle physical activity and body image in undergraduate women. Results suggested that unlike structured exercise, lifestyle physical activity was generally unrelated to women's body image. In light of these findings, the researcher decided to assess body image of female collegiate students based on their physical activity status.

Hypothesis

It was hypothesized that body image in female collegiate students with regular physical activity regimen will be significantly higher as compared to female collegiate students without regular physical activity regimen.

Methodology

The following methodological steps were taken to conduct the present study.

Sample

This study was carried out on 30 female college students engaged in regular physical activity (Average age 19.11 years) and 30 female college students with no active involvement in physical activity (Average age 20.78 years). The sample were students of various higher education colleges operational in Nagpur city. In the present study activities such as cycling, walking, exercise, yoga were considered to be a physical activity.

Tools

Body Image

To assess body image of the selected female collegiate students, Modified Version of Self Assessment Questionnaire for Body Image, prepared by Agashe and Karkare (2008) was used. It consists of 25 multiple choice questions which assess the body image of a person. This test is highly valid and reliable. The scoring pattern of this questionnaire is "Higher the score on BIQ, lower is the body image of a person.

Procedure

30 female collegiate students with regular physical activity regimen and 30 female collegiate students without regular physical activity regimen were identified and selected for the present study. Body image questionnaire was administered to each subject. The manual for body image questionnaire provides procedural steps for the scoring of response and the same was used. After tabulation of data in two study groups, independent sample 't' test was used to analyse the data. Results depicted in table no. 1.

Result and Discussion

Table 1: Comparison of Body Image among Female College Students based on their Physical Activity Status

Physical Activity Status	N	Mean	S.D.	't'	Level of Significance
Physically Active	30	16.80	6.22	2.15	.05
Physically Inactive	30	20.16	5.89		

A perusal of entries shown in table 1 indicates that body image of physically active female collegiate students (M=16.80) was found to be significantly superior as compared to physically inactive female collegiate students (M=20.16). The mean difference of 3.36 and $t=2.15$ both reflect the impact of physical activity on body image of female collegiate students at .05 level of statistical significance.

The results once again reiterate the importance of physical activity in developing a positive body image. Literature in this regard also suggests that physical activity improves physical, physiological and psychological capacities of an individual. Also, physical activity is considered to be good for positive mood states. Hence against contrary findings reported earlier the result showing the influence of physical activity status on body image of female collegiate students is encouraging for creating awareness towards physical activity, physical education and sports-related activities.

Conclusion

The author concludes that regular physical activity such as cycling, walking, exercise, yoga etc. is good for the development of positive body image in female collegiate students.

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