

Poster presentation

## Body shape – self esteem: relationships with sex and body mass index

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### Background

The problems associated with negative body image have received substantial attention in the research literature. This is appropriate, given that in Western cultures there are unrelenting pressures to be thin, particularly for girls and women.

### Objective

The goal of this study was to investigate possible relationships of concern on body shape and self esteem, with sex and Body Mass Index.

### Materials and methods

192 people, 41 men and 151 women, completed the Body Shape Questionnaire (Cooper, Taylor, Cooper and Fairburn 1987), the Self Esteem Rating Scale (William R. Nugent and Janita W. Thomas) and a demographic questionnaire. The mean age of the sample was 36.47 years (SD = 8.99), and the mean Body Mass Index was 26.26 (SD = 6.17).

### Results

A strong negative correlation between perceived concern on body shape and perceived self esteem was identified, Spearman's  $r_s(190) = 0.63$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , with high levels of perceived concern on body shape associated with lower levels of perceived self esteem. A Mann Whitney statistical test was conducted to investigate if there is a significant difference between body shape and self esteem scores of males and females. There was no statistically significant difference in body shape scores of males and females, but there was a statistically significant difference in self esteem scores between men and women ( $p < 0.001$ ), with lower scores on self esteem occurring at women. To investigate

if there is a significant difference in body shape and self esteem scores within the five Body Mass Index categories that we had divided our sample in, according to WHO's criteria (1995) for the definition of obesity, Kruskal-Wallis tests were conducted. Results indicate a significant difference in body shape ( $p < 0.001$ ) and self esteem scores ( $p < 0.001$ ) across the different BMI groups. Subsequent Mann Whitney tests have demonstrated a significant statistical difference in Body Shape scores between all of the BMI categories except from categories 3 and 4, 3 and 5, and 4 and 5. Results were reproduced for self esteem scores across the same categories.

### Discussion

Female sex is a factor associated with lower self esteem scores, but no association with higher concern on body image was proved. Body shape concern increases as we move from lower to higher BMI categories, with the most important changes occurring from normal to overweight and from overweight to entry-level obesity. There was no significant change as obesity increases. A similar pattern is observed with self-esteem scores across the same categories, but in the inverse direction.