



Satisfaction with body image in women practicing physical activity

Satisfação com a imagem corporal em mulheres praticantes de atividade física

DOI: 10.56238/isevjhv2n4-009

Receiving the originals: 19/06/2023

Acceptance for publication: 11/07/2023

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The body image is the way in which the physical appearance appears to the individual, corresponding to the mental representation of the body itself. It is the one we create in our mind of how our body and our appearance is. The search for the perfect body is often influenced by society, the media and the social group we live with and often the search for this cult of the perfect body causes body dissatisfaction, which can lead to psychosocial disorders and low self-esteem. **Objective:** To analyze the satisfaction with the body image of women practicing physical activity in a gym voted exclusively for the female public in the municipality of Nanuque (MG). **Methodology:** This is a quantitative, exploratory and descriptive research, where a questionnaire was applied for sociodemographic and health characterization of the interviewees and another (BodyShapeQuestionnaire - BSQ) to assess the level of satisfaction with body image. **Results:** It was observed that (50%) interviewed women are with normal BMI, (26.67%) finds overweight, (20%) type I obesity, and (3.33%) type II obesity. It was found that (56.67%) of women have no dissatisfaction with body image, (20%) mild dissatisfaction, (10%) moderate dissatisfaction and (13.33%) severe dissatisfaction with image. **Conclusion:** It was concluded that prevalence with body image dissatisfaction in practitioners of physical activity in the gym in Nanuque-MG was low, but showed a correlation where women who are with high BMI then still dissatisfied with their body.

Keywords: Body image, Self-esteem, Body dissatisfaction, Physical activity, Media, Bodybuilding.



1 INTRODUCTION

Body image consists of the mental representation that the individual has in relation to the size, structure, shape and contour of their own body, as well as the feelings related to these characteristics and body parts. It is composed of both cognitive and subjective elements and is influenced by social interaction. It is possible to divide it into two dimensions: perceptual, which concerns the judgment of body size, shape and weight; and attitudinal, which involves affective, cognitive and behavioral aspects (SOUZA *et al.*, 2016).

For Copatti *et al.* (2017) the way someone perceives their own body is closely linked to their self-esteem, which is the set of feelings, consideration and appreciation that the person has for themselves. Body image is one of the elements that are part of the concept of self-esteem, and both are connected and depend on each other.

Nowadays, there is a widespread appreciation of young, beautiful and thin bodies, which are not always attainable. There is a significant cultural tendency to consider thinness as an acceptable ideal for women. Social and media pressure to adopt the thin body as a body standard is directly linked to the emergence of body dissatisfaction, especially among young and adult women (MEIRELES *et al.*, 2016).

According to Almeida and Baptista (2016) due to a great influence of the media, beauty industries, social group that each one lives, where they have the display of perfect and attractive bodies, individuals who do not fit this pattern may feel dissatisfied triggering a search and standardization of a perfect body, leading to a growing increase in the valuation of aspect such as youth, beauty and health, thus making the discussion on this topic important.

The objective of this study was to analyze the satisfaction with the body image of women who practice physical activity in a gym aimed at the female public in the municipality of Nanuque (MG).

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.2 BODY IMAGE

Body image is a complex construct and encompasses the internal perceptions of body structure and physical appearance, both in relation to ourselves and others. It is influenced by our desires, emotional attitudes and social interactions especially with physical appearance and the body, as well as by cultural standards and their need to perceive themselves accepted within certain groups that follow standards that worship the body and beauty. (ALMEIDA and BAPTISTA, 2016).



For Correa (2020), the construction of body perception is related to the individual bonds that each person establishes with their own body, so it is essential to have positive experiences with the body to develop a healthy body image. Thus, social, cultural, psychological and philosophical factors are essential for the formation of identity, self-esteem and body image of each individual. The body is the means by which cultural and social practices that are part of everyday life are demonstrated through actions. It is important to emphasize that body image can be satisfactory or unsatisfactory for each individual.

The formation of body perception is a gradual process that occurs over the years, influenced by the experiences lived. In addition to cognition, it is affected by desires, emotional attitudes and standards imposed by society and the media (AINETTI *et al.*, 2017).

2.2 MEDIA VS. BODY IMAGE

Recently, society has entered a digital age in which appearance is seen as an indicator of success, health and willpower. As a result, beauty standards are set by society and the media, leading many people to seek an idealized physical image (SILVA, 2019). This influence has led to an appreciation of thinness and sculptural bodies as essential requirements for a successful life, and a guarantee of happiness and pleasure (JUNIOR and SANTOS, 2022).

The attempt to meet the aesthetic standard of beauty propagated by the media, combined with the impossibility of achieving it, can have a negative effect on self-esteem and lead to the adoption of harmful eating behaviors, such as restrictive diets, purging (induction of vomiting), use of laxatives or diuretics and excessive physical exercise. These practices, which aim to change body appearance, arise as a response to dissatisfaction with body image, which in turn is a risk and maintenance factor for Eating Disorders (ED) (SOUZA, 2020).

Both males and females are concerned about their body image. With regard to men, there is still little research on the subject. According to the research, women are concerned with seeking weight loss and men increasingly want to increase body mass (DANTAS, 2017).

The search for a perfect body is related to the change in the perception of body image. This ideal is socially influenced, mainly by the media and the social environment in which the person is inserted, and can become an important aspect in the search for personal fulfillment. However, when this understanding is inadequate, it can lead to psychosocial disorders and low self-esteem. Women are more likely to have body dissatisfaction and unhealthy eating behaviors compared to men (MACIEL *et al.*, 2019).



According to Gonçalves and Martinez (2014), it is currently common to observe the presence of body dissatisfaction, especially among women, due to the demands of the current culture that limits the ideal of female beauty to physical appearance. The media and popular culture have contributed to perpetuate this dissatisfaction with the body. As a result, adolescents are influenced to perceive society's valorization of female beauty and to associate more beautiful women with greater opportunities.

This happens according to Gonçalves and Martinez (2014), because due to the great appreciation of beauty and female physical attributes in society, women are socially pressured to be increasingly attractive, which leads to a constant search for improvements in appearance.

Due to a great dissemination in the media and social networks to a program of body perfection, dissatisfaction with the body has been influenced by several factors, such as social, cultural and perceptions, with pressure in the social environments they attend, in which the characteristics of competence and success are associated with thin women and obesity is related to feelings of self-pity, laziness and lack of decision (PIRES, 2017).

Quality of life is a measure that is closely linked to self-esteem and personal well-being, including several factors, such as functional capacity, socioeconomic status, emotional state, ability to social interaction appropriate to the environment, engagement in intellectual activities, self-care practices and lifestyle adopted over time (FERREIRA *et al.*, 2016).

2.3 SELF-ESTEEM X PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

In the scientific literature, it is widely recognized that regular physical exercise is an effective non-pharmacological strategy to treat and prevent a variety of diseases, including those of a metabolic, physical and/or psychological nature (RAIOL, 2020).

According to Machado (2016) people are increasingly aware of the various benefits that the practice of regular activity can offer health, not only for aesthetic reasons that are very relevant, but many individuals are interested in promoting their well-being and quality of life, thus being the main reason for the practice of physical activity.

Several studies show the positive relationship between frequent physical activity and an improvement in quality of life, health and improvement in body composition leading to prevention and control of overweight among others; while sedentary lifestyle has a strong correlation with the development of chronic and hypokinetic diseases (FÜHR, 2018).

According to Viais (2016), the way people relate to their bodies is strongly influenced by several sociocultural factors. Such factors often lead both men and women to have concerns and



dissatisfaction with their body appearance, which motivates them to exercise and take care of their bodies through the practice of appropriate physical activities. This search for a visual appearance considered desirable can lead to specific habits and care for the body.

The practice of physical activity brings positive benefits to body image, thus allowing the individual to have experiences that make him aware of his emotional and social aspects contributing to the formation of positive body identity (MORGADO *et al.*, 2013).

Exercise is often employed as a strategy to reduce body weight in people who are dissatisfied with their body image. However, a negative body image can, contradictorily, decrease motivation to engage in physical activity or lead to increased engagement in exercise programs. Studies have found that exercise can result in reduced depression and improved psychological well-being, as well as a more positive body image in active individuals, regardless of their age and gender (KLIMICK *et al.*, 2017).

Encouraging the benefits of physical exercise has led people to adopt a healthier and more active lifestyle, including preventing cardiovascular diseases, controlling stress and maintaining ideal weight (MENDES and SILVA, 2020).

Considering that the search in gyms is widely sought after for its multiple benefits, such as health improvement, quality of life, aesthetic aspects and personal and social well-being, it is important to highlight that continuity in practice involves not only body care, but also interests related to the health area, including rehabilitation and prevention programs (MUDESTO and SILVA, 2018).

It is with the search for change in lifestyle and various roles in society that the practice of bodybuilding has become a priority for women improving not only their physical health but also mental, for a better quality of life (MUDESTO and SILVA, 2018).

In order to conform to social standards, women seek various alternatives to shape their bodies, and one of these alternatives is the practice of physical activities in gyms. The fitness industry surprisingly for a service considered non-essential, even in the face of the economic crises that occurred in the first decade of the 2000s, maintained a continuous and gradual growth (FERRARI *et al.*, 2019).



2.4 THE CULT OF THE BODY THAT TRIGGERS DISSATISFACTION WITH BODY IDENTITY

For COELHO *et al.*, (2015) the passage from the end of the 20th century to the beginning of the 21st century will be marked as a period in which the obsession with the body intensified, becoming a lifestyle. In particular, there is a connection between the body and prestige, thus triggering a cult of the body.

According to Viais (2016), the concept of beauty is not directly linked to health, but to a body image considered attractive by society. Unfortunately, the model of beauty idealized by today's society corresponds to a thin body, often ignoring essential aspects related to health.

Body dissatisfaction can be defined as a concern about weight, body shape and the amount of fat in the body. Depending on the level of dissatisfaction, this can affect several aspects of the individual's life, such as their self-esteem, eating behavior, and physical, cognitive, and psychosocial abilities (KLIMICK *et al.*, 2017).

Lack of satisfaction with the body is an attitude disorder in relation to body image, which idealizes the search for the "perfect" body, consisting of a negative subjective perception of one's own appearance, being measured by the discrepancy between the real body image and the idealized one, that is, the adoption of this ideal as a reference and its influence on the way a person behaves and thinks about himself plays a significant role in the occurrence of body dissatisfaction (LIRA *et al.*, 2017).

3 METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

This is a quantitative, exploratory and descriptive research, in which the study was conducted in a gym where only women are enrolled. It was analyzed how these women who practice physical activity feel about their body, and how this influences their life; the main reasons that lead them to do physical activity and how these activities influence their body image. Two validated and modified structured questionnaires were used: an initial questionnaire to obtain sociodemographic and health information of the participants, through an anamnesis that included data such as name, age, number of children, weight, height, level of education, monthly income and time of bodybuilding practice. It is important to emphasize that all this information was kept confidential and used only for scientific purposes.

The BodyShapeQuestionnaire (BSQ), a questionnaire on body perception composed of 34 self-assessment questions, was used as the second questionnaire of the research. It was created in 1987 by Cooper *et al.* and later translated and presented in Portuguese by Di Pietro and Silveira in



2009. Each question in the questionnaire offers six response options, ranging from: 1) Never, 2) Rarely, 3) Sometimes, 4) Often, 5) Very Often and 6) Always. The classification of body image distortion was determined by the sum of points ranging from 34 to 204 points, being considered no body dissatisfaction less than or equal to 80 points, from 81 to 110 points mild dissatisfaction, 111 to 140 points moderate dissatisfaction and severe dissatisfaction greater than 140 points.

The sample consisted of 30 women practicing physical activities, between 23 and 70 years of age at the gym in the municipality of Nanuque- MG. The questionnaires were applied from the 9th to the 12th of May 2023, from 05:30 to 10 am.

The inclusion criteria were observed women practicing physical exercise who were present on the date described. We excluded 05 people who refused to participate in the research due to time constraints.

All participants signed the Informed Consent Form, agreeing to participate in the research. It is important to emphasize that the interviewees can withdraw from participating in the research at any time, if they wish. Under no circumstances will they be identified or have their names disclosed.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

It was observed that of the 30 women enrolled in the academy in the city of Nanuque-MG, 30% are aged 20 to 29, 30% are aged 30 to 39, 23.33% are aged 40 to 49, 10% are aged 50 to 59 and 6.67% are aged 60 to 70. The marital status of the interviewees 30% single, married 60%, divorced 6.67% and widowed 3.33%. Number of women who have no children 20%, 27.33% have one child, 30% have two children, 10% have three children, 13.33% four children and 3.33% 5 or more children. Regarding the monthly family income ranges up to 1 minimum wage corresponds to 36.67% of women; from 1 to 5 minimum wages 60%; from 5 to 10 minimum wages 3.33%. Regarding the level of education, it was observed that 20% of the interviewees had incomplete elementary school, 50% had completed high school, 3.33% had incomplete higher education, 16.67% had completed higher education and 10% had completed postgraduate studies.

Asked about the practice of physical activity, 56.67% practice only weight training and 43.33% practice weight training and aerobic. As for the time of practice of physical activity, 30% practice in 6 months; from 7 months to 1 year 26.67%; 1 to 2 years 13.33% and 26.67% practice more than 2 years. Most of them practice more than 4 times a week 83.33% and 16.67% practice 3 times a week (Table 1):

Table 1- Characteristics on the practice of physical activities (n=30)

Variable	Classification	f	%
Activities practiced	Bodybuilding	17	56,67
	Aerobic and weight training	13	43,33
Total		30	100
Time spent in physical activity	Up to 6 months	9	30
	7 months to 1 year	18	26,67
	1 to 2 years	4	13,33
	More than 2 years	9	30
Total		30	100
Number of times a week they do weight training or aerobics	3x a week	5	16,67
	More than 4x a week	25	83,33
Total		30	100

Legend: f: simple frequency; %: relative frequency

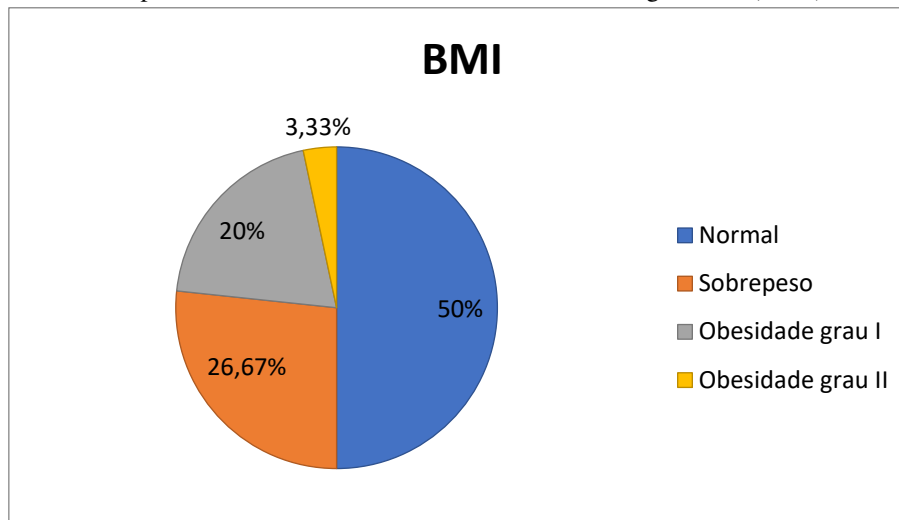
Source: Survey data

For people to enjoy a healthy and satisfying life, it is essential that they seek balance, pleasure and health. To achieve these goals, it is necessary for each individual to dedicate themselves to practicing physical exercise regularly, according to their biological characteristics and personal preferences, so that they can enjoy the overall benefits in a pleasurable way. With this approach, it is possible to obtain extremely positive results and significantly improve health, remembering that lifestyle change is an essential factor and the constant practice of exercise is crucial to maintain these benefits over time (PEIXOTO and CRUZ, 2018).

Currently, the practice of physical activities, exercises and sports have become essential for the preservation and improvement of physical, mental and emotional health, aiming at well-being. What was previously seen as a form of recreation or entertainment has now become a determining factor in achieving a quality of life desired by many (NETO *et al.*, 2018).

The following graph (Graph 1) presents the results from the sample that was composed of 30 women who according to BMI, it was found that 50% have normal BMI; 26.67% overweight; 20% in obesity grade I; 3.33% in obesity grade II. For evaluation, BMI was calculated based on the weight and height data obtained from each participant.

Graph 1: Classification of those evaluated according to BMI (n=30)



Source: survey data

According to the literature, it is indicated that the combination of nutritional counseling and moderate intensity physical exercise also leads to a decrease in Body Mass Index (BMI) and body fat (PANATTO *et al.*, 2019).

For Peixoto and Cruz (2018), weight training gyms are a popular option for those who seek improvements in their social, physical and psychological well-being through the regular practice of physical exercises in urban areas, thus reducing the percentage of fat and high caloric expenditure in individuals, as this providing body changes that result in personal satisfaction and aesthetics thus leading to an improvement in the components of the human body and can bring significant benefits to the health and quality of life of the individual as a whole.

According to scientific studies involving overweight adults, it is proven that training with moderate intensity aerobic activities results in an effective reduction in total body fat. However, this type of training has little effectiveness in reducing fat-free muscle mass (OLIVEIRA *et al.*, 2019).

When analyzing the satisfaction of women with their body, according to the research score, the following result was obtained: 56.67% of women have no body dissatisfaction, that is, with a score less than or equal to 80 points; 20% have mild body dissatisfaction with a score of 81 to 110 points; 10% have moderate body dissatisfaction from 111 to 140 and 13.33% had severe dissatisfaction with a score greater than 140 points. When analyzing the BMI of the participants compared with the body satisfaction questionnaire (BSQ), statistically significant results were obtained and it was verified that the presence of some type of body dissatisfaction is correlated with BMI.

Table 2: Classification of the level of satisfaction with the Body Image of the women interviewed (n=30)

Variable	f	%
No body dissatisfaction	17	56,67
Mild body dissatisfaction	6	20
Moderate body dissatisfaction	3	10
Severe body dissatisfaction	4	13,33
Total	30	100

Source: survey data

According to Fernandes (2018), self-esteem, body satisfaction and psychological well-being, according to the results obtained, reveal a positive association with the practice of physical activity.

With the practice of physical activity, it makes you have a self-perception of your body, in addition to the benefits they bring to health, also body satisfaction, because you have raising self-image and your confidence making people become internally strengthened, feeling good about yourself and raising your self-esteem, especially for the female audience (CORREA, 2020).

It can be observed that the relationship between body composition and body dissatisfaction often occurs only among individuals who are extremely dissatisfied with their appearance and body image. It is important to highlight that this body dissatisfaction is associated, even more with physical well-being than physical condition itself (SCHLICKMANN *et al.*, 2018).

Currently, the demand for improving fitness and maintaining health has increased, which leads many people to attend gyms and practice various types of physical exercises. At the same time, there is a search for faster methods to achieve their goals more easily (SPERANDIO *et al.*, 2017).

5 CONCLUSION

It was concluded that the prevalence of dissatisfaction with body image in practitioners of physical activity in the gym in Nanuque-MG was low, but many women who are with high BMI were still dissatisfied with their body. The media and the current culture put as standard thin women, without localized fat, flaccidity, cellulite, stretch marks among others, these standards should not exist, since they stimulate the intangible search for the perfect body, which can lead to a distortion of body image generating depression, anxiety, dissatisfaction with the body itself. It is important for people to know and love themselves more, because each woman has her real beauty. Looking from another angle, the practice of physical activity can positively influence body image as well as (and more importantly) physical and mental health, providing a better quality of life, disease prevention, pleasure and well-being, going far beyond the aesthetic response.



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