

Original Article

Perceived Sociocultural Pressure and Body Dissatisfaction Among Female University Students

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ABSTRACT

Background: This study investigates the relationship between perceived sociocultural pressure and body dissatisfaction among female university students. With the escalating influence of media and societal norms, understanding these dynamics is crucial, especially in the context of Pakistani culture where such studies are relatively scarce.

Objective: To explore the correlation between perceived sociocultural pressure and body dissatisfaction among female university students in Islamabad and Rawalpindi, and to examine the impact of various demographic factors on these variables.

Methods: The study involved 300 female university students from public and private universities in Islamabad and Rawalpindi, using a convenient sampling technique. The Perceived Sociocultural Pressure Scale and the Body Dissatisfaction Scale were employed to measure the study variables. The reliability of the instruments was established through Cronbach's alpha.

Results: Perceived sociocultural pressure was found to be significantly positively correlated with body dissatisfaction ($r = .37, p < .05$). No significant correlations were observed between these variables and age or monthly family income. Participants from urban areas showed higher body dissatisfaction compared to those from rural areas. Perceived sociocultural pressure significantly predicted body dissatisfaction ($\beta = .39, p < .001$), accounting for 14% of the variance in body dissatisfaction.

Conclusion: The findings indicate a significant relationship between perceived sociocultural pressure and body dissatisfaction among the studied sample, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to mitigate these issues in the Pakistani context.

Keywords: Body Dissatisfaction, Female University Students, Islamabad, Perceived Sociocultural Pressure, Rawalpindi.

INTRODUCTION

Perceived sociocultural pressure and body dissatisfaction are critical factors impacting the mental and physical health of female university students. These elements play a significant role in shaping attitudes and behaviors concerning body image, influenced by a range of social and cultural factors.

Perceived sociocultural pressure encapsulates the impact of societal and cultural norms on an individual's body image perceptions. This pressure, emanating from various sources such as social media, family, and societal expectations, significantly affects how individuals view and assess their bodies. Body dissatisfaction, increasingly prevalent and consequential, arises from a negative subjective assessment of one's appearance or specific physical traits. This dissatisfaction often results from the disparity between internal preferences and external societal standards of an ideal body image. It has been noted that women, more than men, are prone to lifelong body dissatisfaction, a phenomenon termed as normative discontent in Western societies (1).

The importance of body image, encompassing an individual's mental representation and comfort levels with their body, cannot be overstated. It profoundly influences psychological development, shaping self-esteem and personal values (2). Understanding the interplay between perceived sociocultural pressure and body dissatisfaction is vital for fostering a healthier body image and preventing harmful behaviors and disorders. Recognizing and mitigating societal pressures is crucial in creating a more inclusive environment that accepts diverse body types and sizes (3).

Adolescence marks a pivotal period for self and identity development, where adolescents engage in exploring their identity and how they fit into their social environment. During this stage, body dissatisfaction emerges as a significant construct, reflecting negative self-perceptions and concerns about one's body (4).

Perceived Sociocultural Pressure

Perceived sociocultural pressure involves the individual's perception of societal expectations regarding beauty, thinness, and muscularity. In young women, this pressure is a significant risk factor for body dissatisfaction (5,6,7). Sainte et al. identified families, peers, and the media as primary sources of sociocultural influence. These influences often lead to the internalization of societal messages about thinness and beauty, deemed crucial for a woman's success (8-12). Societal influences transmitted through media, peers, and relatives have been identified as potential sources of body dissatisfaction (9,13). Family dynamics, particularly maternal feedback, play a role in fostering body dissatisfaction among young women (13). The sociocultural model, considering societal influences as the primary source of body dissatisfaction, has garnered substantial empirical support (14).

Types of Perceived Sociocultural Pressure

Peer Pressure & Family Pressure

Types of perceived sociocultural pressure include peer and family pressure. Research indicates that peer influence, particularly regarding perceptions of thinness and popularity, significantly impacts body dissatisfaction and eating-related issues, especially in females (15,16,18). Peer criticism and teasing are linked to negative self-perceptions and lower self-worth (21,23). Family dynamics also play a crucial role. Supportive and nurturing parents contribute positively to body image satisfaction, while lack of emotional support is associated with greater dissatisfaction (24,25,26). Sociocultural factors are integral in the development of body dissatisfaction among female adolescents and adults, with societal demands for thinness and media portrayal of an idealized slim body contributing to eating disorders and dissatisfaction (27,28).

Body dissatisfaction remains a prevalent issue among female university students, affecting their emotional and physical well-being. The pressure to conform to an idealized body image, fuelled by family, friends, media, and societal standards, is a key contributor to this discontent. These pressures often underscore the importance of achieving an unrealistic body image, leading to negative self-evaluations and feelings of inadequacy (29,30).

Theoretical Perspective of Perceived Sociocultural Pressure

Understanding perceived sociocultural pressure necessitates delving into theories that elucidate the mechanisms and variables contributing to individuals' experiences with societal and cultural pressures. Notable among these are the Social Comparison Theory and the Social Learning Theory.

Social Comparison Theory

Developed by Festinger, the Social Comparison Theory posits that in the absence of objective benchmarks, individuals have an intrinsic drive to evaluate their own abilities and opinions by comparing themselves with others. This theory has evolved significantly since its inception (31). Initially focused on comparisons with similar others, it now encompasses comparisons with dissimilar individuals, including body traits and dietary habits. The direction of this comparison plays a crucial role: downward comparisons may boost self-esteem, while upward comparisons often decrease well-being.

Research by Tiggemann and McGill (2004) identified a positive correlation between women's yearning for ideal thinness and their engagement in social comparison (29). Studies have spotlighted the societal messages promoting an unrealistic and sometimes false body ideal, detrimental to genuine body image perceptions. Women subjected to heightened sociocultural pressure often harbor weight concerns leading to body dissatisfaction. Significantly, ideals set by distant figures like celebrities or media personalities exert a more substantial impact than those from family and friends (32). Myers and Crowther (2007) observed that females align more with social standards than males (33). Individuals, influenced by social comparison, often set goals aligned with significant others who embody perceived realistic ideals (34). This frequent behavior, where life's meaning is deduced by comparing with media standards, shapes new aspirations and efforts, often culminating in body dissatisfaction.

Studies have also highlighted that young women are particularly susceptible to media portrayals, often accepting these projections uncritically. This acceptance leads to attempts at emulating media personas, fostering body dissatisfaction (29,35). Furthermore, the media's emphasis on underweight feminine body types and stereotypical portrayals of women as submissive or reliant on men exacerbates this issue (33). Williams et al. (2001) criticized the sociocultural pressure for promoting a narrow spectrum of women as ideal, thereby propelling women towards unattainable sociocultural goals (36).

Social Learning Theory

Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977) posits that individuals develop behaviors through observation and imitation of others. In the context of perceived sociocultural pressure, female university students may internalize societal standards concerning beauty, body image, and relationships, leading to anxiety, diminished self-esteem, and psychological distress (37,38). The concept

of perceived sociocultural pressure intertwines with Social Learning Theory, suggesting that the social and cultural milieu influences learning through observation and imitation. The term 'perceived sociocultural pressure' refers to the sense that one's behavior conforms to the norms and expectations of their social and cultural context.

Research indicates that perceived societal pressure significantly impacts behavior. Individuals experiencing intense pressure from their social and cultural environments to conform may be more prone to engage in risky behaviors, such as substance abuse or disordered eating (39).

The Social Comparison Theory and the Social Learning Theory provide crucial insights into perceived sociocultural pressure. They elucidate the mechanisms through which societal and cultural norms influence individual behaviors and attitudes, particularly among female university students. Understanding these theoretical perspectives is essential in addressing the challenges posed by perceived sociocultural pressure and fostering a healthier and more inclusive societal environment.

Body Dissatisfaction

Body dissatisfaction, as defined by Cash (2012), is a negative subjective experience characterized by discontent or displeasure with one's body size, shape, weight, or appearance (40). This concept extends to the multidimensional and dynamic aspects of body image, encompassing internal biological and psychological factors as well as external cultural and social influences (40). It represents a marked psychological disparity between an individual's perceived and ideal body, involving negative assessments of body parts such as figure, weight, stomach, buttocks, and hips (33).

This dissatisfaction encompasses cognitive, behavioral, and emotional components related to one's body, such as dissatisfaction with physical parts or overall physical attractiveness. It often leads to unfavorable thoughts about body weight and a discrepancy between ideal and current weight (7,42). Gender differences are apparent in body dissatisfaction, with boys often expressing a desire to be more muscular and girls showing a preference for slimness. This dissatisfaction can lead to the development of eating disorders (25).

Body dissatisfaction is not limited to subjective feelings but also contributes to obesity and excess weight (43). Studies have shown that women, particularly those who are obese, are more likely to experience body dissatisfaction than their normal-weight counterparts (44). The cognitive, perceptual, and behavioral aspects of an individual's body image play a crucial role in influencing women's self-esteem and self-worth.

Self-perception, as discussed by Thompson and Chad (2000), is how an individual conceptualizes their physical appearance (28). Grogan et al. (2009) describe body dissatisfaction as negative thoughts about one's own body, including aspects like muscle tone, shape, size, and the discrepancy between one's actual body type and the ideal body (7). This dissatisfaction often manifests as physical discomfort, heightened weight vigilance, and self-perception of being overweight or underweight.

The influence of media in propagating body dissatisfaction is significant. Media sources, including fashion models, actors, and celebrities, promote a particular body weight and shape as ideal, often differing by up to 23% from the average person's body (45). Life events also play a role in shaping body image and can lead to dissatisfaction. Changes due to aging, puberty, menstruation cessation in women, disability, illness, and injury can affect body image. Psychological factors, such as stress and life strain, also impact body image, leading to dissatisfaction (46).

Body dissatisfaction affects various aspects of life, including self-esteem, social relationships, and sexual behavior. It can lead to cessation of exercise or neglect of health maintenance. Studies indicate a higher prevalence of body dissatisfaction among women than men, with obesity being a significant contributing factor (13). Grogan et al. (2009) emphasize that body dissatisfaction involves judgments about size and shape, muscle tone, and discrepancies between one's physique, ideal body, and perceived appearance (7). Cash (2005) further elaborated on body dissatisfaction, defining it as perceiving oneself as unattractive, being dissatisfied with various physical features, and heightened awareness of being over or underweight (42). This dissatisfaction arises from both external pressures and internal self-evaluations, often leading to distress, anxiety, and poor self-evaluation.

In sum, body dissatisfaction results from a combination of cognitive, behavioral, and emotional factors related to the body. It encompasses dissatisfaction with body parts or overall physical appearance and negative self-evaluation of features such as figure, weight, and body parts. The discrepancy between a person's ideal and actual weight contributes to this dissatisfaction, influencing their eating behaviors and self-perception (6). Addressing body dissatisfaction requires understanding its multifaceted nature and the interplay of various internal and external factors.

Factors effecting body dissatisfaction.

Body dissatisfaction is significantly influenced by appearance-based social comparison. When individuals compare their bodies to others, they often develop negative perceptions of their own physique. This tendency is particularly noticeable among women, who may focus their attention on the bodies of other women, leading to dissatisfaction. Factors contributing to these adverse judgments include a predisposition towards body dissatisfaction. When women are dissatisfied, they often aspire to be thinner and engage in

comparisons with those who are slimmer. Similarly, men also experience dissatisfaction, particularly when unable to meet societal standards of body shape and size. These experiences often lead to low self-worth, social isolation, concern over weight, and potential loss of interest in healthful activities such as physical exercise and balanced diet, sometimes leading to drug addiction(13).

Family and peers play significant roles in shaping body image. Their behaviors and attitudes can directly and indirectly influence an individual's perception of their body. Research indicates that the onset of primary education is a crucial period for developing body dissatisfaction, especially among young women with a higher body mass index. This dissatisfaction tends to begin around the ages of 9 to 10, with the desire for slimness persisting into late adolescence(47).

Occurrence of Body Dissatisfaction

Body dissatisfaction among adolescent girls ranges from 57% to 87%, and between 49% to 82% among adolescent boys across various studies. The negative perception of body image has increased substantially over the past 25 years. Survey results from 1972 to 1996 show an increase in body dissatisfaction among women, ranging from 23% to 56%. About 60% of teenage girls and 25% of all adolescents report clinically significant levels of body dissatisfaction, potentially leading to emotional and physical health issues(35).

Difference Between Ideal & Actual Body Type and Body Dissatisfaction

Females generally exhibit higher rates of body dissatisfaction than males. Past studies have shown that males and females differ in their perception and importance placed on their bodies. Females traditionally use their appearance to attract attention and are more likely to experience dissatisfaction due to societal pressures for slenderness and attractiveness(23). Cash (2012) identified two main components of body dissatisfaction: appraisal (one's satisfaction level with appearance) and investment (the psychological significance placed on appearance)(40). These can relate to overall appearance or specific physical features such as body weight and shape.

Theoretical Perspective of Body Dissatisfaction

Socio-Cultural Theory

The socio-cultural approach focuses on understanding human behavior and perceptions as influenced by environmental factors. One key factor in body dissatisfaction is the internalization of the thin ideal, where individuals adopt societal standards of beauty and engage in behaviors to meet these norms(5). This internalization often occurs when exposed to images of thin ideals and messages that thinness equates to success and happiness. Pressure from parents, peers, partners, and the media can intensify this internalization and lead to body dissatisfaction.

Smolak et al. (2001) noted that women's body dissatisfaction is influenced by society's endorsement of thinness, the objectification of women's bodies, and the perceived benefits or penalties associated with attractiveness(49). Mass media has been identified as a powerful transmitter of these assumptions, often presenting an over-glamorized ideal body image that is unattainable for most women(41). Botta (2003) highlighted the irony in media portrayal of the perfect body, often portrayed by individuals with eating disorders or those with access to personal trainers, and enhanced through camera techniques, creating a significant disparity from actual body shapes(34).

Stice (1994) found that women are particularly susceptible to media portrayals of unrealistic ideals, leading to body dissatisfaction. Similarly, Perloff (2014) reported that most women view a muscular physique as the ideal male body type, while only a small percentage favour slenderness(30). Thompson and Tantleff (1999) provided evidence supporting the presence of a muscular ideal, associating broad chests with positive traits and lack of muscles with negative characteristics(5).

Body dissatisfaction is influenced by a complex interplay of social comparison, family and peer influences, and media portrayals. The socio-cultural theory provides a framework to understand how societal norms and media representations shape individuals' perceptions of their bodies, leading to varying degrees of dissatisfaction based on internal and external factors.

Cognitive Social Learning Model.

Developed by Cash (2012), the Cognitive Social Learning Model evaluates the self-attitude components of body image construction, encompassing five elements: appearance evaluation, appearance orientation, body area satisfaction, preoccupation with weight, and self-classified weight. Appearance evaluation refers to emotions of physical attractiveness or unattractiveness, while appearance orientation denotes the amount of effort a person invests in their appearance, including grooming practices. Body area satisfaction pertains to feelings of contentment or dissatisfaction with specific body parts. Overweight preoccupation involves concerns about body fat and vigilance about dieting, and self-classified weight relates to individuals' perceptions of being overweight or underweight(40).

Perceived sociocultural pressure and body dissatisfaction have been extensively studied among female university students. Studies, such as those by McCabe et al. (2004) and Bardone-Cone et al. (2010), have linked perceived pressure from family, peers, and media to conform to thinness ideals with heightened body dissatisfaction(25). This model elucidates how factors like physical attributes,

cultural socialization, personality traits, individual experiences, and identity aspects contribute to the formation of body image attitudes and perceptions, evoking emotions and behaviors that are often negatively reinforced.

Self-Discrepancy Theory

Self-Discrepancy Theory consists of three domains of self: the actual self, the ideal self, and the ought self. The actual self encompasses personal attitudes towards one's body, often magnified and critically evaluated. Positive self-perception can lead to favorable comparisons and a sense of superiority. Conversely, negative self-perception might result in unfavorable comparisons and feelings of inferiority.

The ideal self refers to a person's aspirations, while the ought self relates to the attributes that one believes they should possess, often influenced by societal expectations. Discrepancies between the actual and ideal selves can lead to dissatisfaction, particularly among women who often experience a gap between their current state and societal standards(50).

Cultivation Theory

Cultivation Theory, influenced by Bandura's Social Learning Theory, focuses on the role of media, particularly television, in shaping individuals' responses and attitudes. This theory suggests that behaviors can be learned both directly and indirectly through observation and imitation of role models such as parents, peers, celebrities, and other media figures. Direct learning involves mimicking observed behaviors, while indirect learning occurs through the influence of media portrayals on one's opinions and attitudes. Media figures, due to their perceived success and ideal lifestyles, are often modeled, leading to both deliberate and unintentional learning. For instance, television viewing can alter women's perceptions of their bodies, and exposure to idealized body images in the media can influence dietary patterns and body satisfaction(33).

Summary of Theories and Body Dissatisfaction

These theories collectively provide a comprehensive understanding of body dissatisfaction. The Cognitive Social Learning Model by Cash emphasizes the importance of individual attitudes and perceptions in body dissatisfaction, while the Self-Discrepancy Theory highlights the impact of the gap between actual and ideal selves. Cultivation Theory underscores the significant role of media in shaping body image perceptions.

Research indicates that women tend to select thinner figures as ideal compared to their current body size, leading to body dissatisfaction. This pattern of discrepancy between the actual and ideal selves is more pronounced in women, who often face societal pressures to conform to specific body standards. Consequently, these theoretical frameworks offer vital insights into the complex interplay of psychological, social, and media influences on body dissatisfaction.

Relationship between Study Variables

Perceived Sociocultural Pressure and Body Dissatisfaction

Extensive research has established a significant link between perceived sociocultural pressure and body dissatisfaction, particularly among female university students. McCabe and Ricciardelli (2004) identified a direct correlation between pressure from family, peers, and media to adhere to thinness ideals and increased levels of body dissatisfaction(25). Grogan (2021) further indicated that appearance comparison and the internalization of thinness ideals mediate this relationship, especially in the context of social media influence(6).

Consistently, studies have demonstrated that both positive and negative messages regarding appearance significantly impact women's self-esteem. Media, in particular, has been shown to exert a greater influence compared to peer and family pressure in fostering body dissatisfaction. Young educated women, often comparing themselves to the idealized images portrayed by the media, experience lower levels of fulfillment. Additionally, girls subjected to mockery or criticism by peers are more prone to body dissatisfaction and are likely to adopt restrictive diets.

A positive association has been observed between peer, social, family, and cultural influences and body dissatisfaction. Girls and young women often perceive leanness and body size as linked to social acceptance, with overweight girls showing more dissatisfaction compared to their underweight counterparts. The tendency for upward comparison, where individuals compare themselves with others they perceive as superior, exacerbates this dissatisfaction, affecting both women and men(48).

Research by Cash (2005) through meta-analysis confirmed that sociocultural pressure is related to increased levels of body dissatisfaction. The study revealed that negative self-evaluations and social comparisons are more prevalent among women and inversely related to age, underlining the pervasive influence of societal norms on body image(42).

Pakistani Context of Study Variables

In Pakistan, studies like those by Naveed et al. (2020) and Azhaar et al. (2020) have explored the relationship between media pressure and body dissatisfaction among female university students. These studies shed light on the influence of media exposure, internalization of beauty ideals, and social comparison on body dissatisfaction within the Pakistani context(51,52).

Saghir and Hyland (2017) found that body weight dissatisfaction was more common among overweight girls, with difficulties in communicating with parents being a contributing factor(50). These findings suggest a significant impact of sociocultural factors on body image and self-perception among Pakistani women.

These studies collectively highlight the intricate relationship between perceived sociocultural pressure and body dissatisfaction. They underscore the impact of media, peer, and family influences on body image perceptions, particularly among female university students. The research also emphasizes the need for a more comprehensive understanding of these variables across different cultural contexts, including Pakistan, to address the pervasive issues of body dissatisfaction and its associated psychological impacts.

Study Variables and Demographic Variables

Perceived Sociocultural Pressure and Age

Studies indicate that perceived sociocultural pressure relating to appearance tends to escalate during adolescence and into young adulthood, likely due to increased media exposure and the internalization of beauty ideals. Adolescents and young adults, navigating identity formation and seeking social acceptance, become more sensitive to societal beauty standards, augmenting this pressure(35).

Body Dissatisfaction and Age

Body dissatisfaction is particularly prominent during adolescence, a critical period for developing self-perceptions and adapting to sociocultural norms. This phase, marked by significant physical, social, and emotional development, sees heightened body image concerns. Cash (2005) observed that younger women are more inclined towards thinner body ideals than older women, suggesting higher prevalence of body dissatisfaction in younger age groups(42).

Research consistently shows that women experience more social pressure related to body image compared to men, with frequent exercise linked to reduced body dissatisfaction. Tiggemann and McGill (2004) found that older women tend to exercise more rational control over their body image expectations compared to younger women, who are more influenced by societal beauty standards and media models(29).

Body dissatisfaction varies across different life stages. While some studies suggest its increase from adolescence through various growth phases(53), others argue for its constancy from teenage years into adulthood(18, 23, 43). Adolescents, amidst bodily changes and evolving relationships, experience increased vulnerability to body image disturbances, with girls facing more challenges than boys due to societal scrutiny on physical appearance(47).

Perceived Sociocultural Pressure and Family System

Family systems significantly contribute to perceived sociocultural pressure by reinforcing societal beauty standards and expectations. Parental attitudes, comments, and behaviors concerning appearance can profoundly influence an individual's perception of societal beauty ideals. Families that emphasize conformity to societal beauty standards may increase perceived sociocultural pressure, while those promoting diverse beauty ideals could mitigate such pressure(11).

Body Dissatisfaction and Family System

Parents play a pivotal role in shaping their children's body image perceptions. Families emphasizing appearance, engaging in weight-related criticisms, or exhibiting body dissatisfaction themselves are likely to influence their children towards greater body consciousness. Children internalizing these attitudes and behaviors from their parents can develop increasing body dissatisfaction. Research by Crespo et al. (2010) suggests that in joint family systems, female students display higher levels of body dissatisfaction(26).

Rationale of the Present Research

The primary goal of this research is to explore the relationship between perceived sociocultural pressure and body dissatisfaction among female university students. Body dissatisfaction is a widespread phenomenon, increasingly prevalent with the rise of media influence and societal beauty standards(40). In Pakistan, this concern is particularly evident among young girls who express dissatisfaction with their body shape, skin tone, and other physical attributes.

Despite the global prevalence of body dissatisfaction, research in Eastern societies, including Pakistan, remains limited. Most existing studies focus on social media usage rather than the broader spectrum of sociocultural influences. This gap in literature highlights the need for comprehensive research on perceived sociocultural pressure and its impact on body dissatisfaction among Pakistani female university students.

Body dissatisfaction, leading to various mental health issues, is a growing concern in Pakistan, influenced by shifts towards Western lifestyles and changing cultural norms. University students, especially females, struggle with negative body perceptions and appearance evaluations, contributing to psychological distress. This research aims to understand how societal beauty standards and comparisons influence body dissatisfaction, potentially informing prevention and intervention strategies. Understanding the dynamics of perceived sociocultural pressures among university students is crucial for addressing this significant mental health issue.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

In the study aimed at exploring the relationship between perceived sociocultural pressure and body dissatisfaction among female university students, a correlational research design was employed. The primary objective was to investigate this relationship and to examine variations in the study variables across different demographic groups. To this end, two hypotheses were formulated: firstly, it was hypothesized that perceived sociocultural pressure would be positively related to body dissatisfaction. Secondly, it was anticipated that there would be a negative correlation between these variables and age, with younger students (bachelors level) expected to report higher levels of both perceived sociocultural pressure and body dissatisfaction compared to older students (M.Phil level). Additionally, it was posited that students from joint family systems would exhibit higher scores on both variables compared to those from nuclear family systems.

The sample comprised 300 female university students, primarily drawn from educational institutions in Rawalpindi and Islamabad. Convenience sampling was employed, with participants who expressed willingness to participate being provided with questionnaires. Prior to data collection, permission was obtained from the Heads of Departments of the respective institutions. Each student was approached individually, and the nature and purpose of the study were thoroughly explained. Clear guidelines were provided both verbally and, on the questionnaires, to ensure accurate and reflective responses. The confidentiality of participants' data was assured, emphasizing that the information would only be used for research purposes. Queries from students regarding the survey items were addressed by the researcher to facilitate comprehension and accurate responses.

Two instruments were used for data collection. The Perceived Sociocultural Pressure Scale, developed by Stice and Whitenton (12), consists of 10 items that assess an individual's perception of societal and cultural pressures to conform to certain standards. Responses range from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), with higher scores indicating greater perceived sociocultural pressure. This scale demonstrated an internal consistency of .91 and an alpha reliability of .86 in the current sample.

The Body Dissatisfaction Scale, developed by Garner, Olmstead, and Polivy (54), comprises 10 items that evaluate attitudes related to body shape, specifically focusing on aspects of body dissatisfaction relevant to eating disorders. This scale uses a response range from 1 (Always) to 6 (Never), with higher total scores indicating greater body dissatisfaction. The scale reported an internal consistency of .95 and an alpha reliability of .77 in the present study.

RESULTS

This chapter covers the current study's findings on the correlation between perceived sociocultural pressure and body dissatisfaction among female university students.

For quantitative analysis, the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS 25 for Windows) was used to analysis data. This study was based on empirical data, so the results have been presented in the form of the tables given in the chapter. The statistical analysis of the present study includes descriptive statistics, correlation, Independent sample t test, one way ANOVA and Linear Regression.

Table 1

Frequencies and Percentages of Demographic Variables of the current study (N=300)

Characteristics	N	%
Education		
Bachelors	207	69.0
M.Phil	87	29.0
Ph.d	6	2.0
Institute		
Public	184	61.3
Private	116	38.7
Family System		
Nuclear	153	51.0
Joint	147	49.0
Residence		
Rural	128	42.7
Urban	172	57.3

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics and Alpha Reliabilities of Study Variables (N=300) Range

Scales	No.of items	α	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	Potential	Actual
PSCP	10	.86	34.32	8.45	-.67	.27	10-50	10-50
BDS	10	.77	41.67	8.92	-1.35	-.15	10-60	14-60

Note. PSCP= Perceived Sociocultural Pressure Scale; BDS=Body Dissatisfaction Scale.

Table 2 illustrates the descriptive statistics, including Cronbach’s alpha coefficients, means, standard deviation; Skewness, kurtosis and score range details. It has been found that the Perceived Sociocultural Pressure Scale and Body Dissatisfaction Scale have shown an acceptable range of reliability for the current study. In addition, values of mean and standard deviation also provide evidence of the normal distribution of data. The Skewness and kurtosis values indicate that the data is within the acceptable range.

Table 3
 Correlations for Study Variables, Age and Monthly Family Income (N=300)

Scales	1	2	3	4
1 PSCP	-	.37**	-.18	-.28
2 BDS		-	-.13	-.08
3 Age			-	.02
4 MFI				-

Note. PSCP= Perceived Sociocultural Pressure Scale; BDS=Body Dissatisfaction Scale; Monthly Family Income= MFI

Table 3 reveals that perceived sociocultural pressure has a significant positive relationship with body dissatisfaction. Findings indicate that age and monthly family income has negative non-significant correlation with both perceived sociocultural pressure and body dissatisfaction.

Table 4
 Comparison of Institute Along Perceived Sociocultural Pressure, and Body Dissatisfaction (N=300)

Scales	Public n=(184)		Private n=(116)		t(298)	P	Cohen’s d
	M	SD	M	SD			
PSCP	33.95	9.51	34.92	6.41	-.96	.33	.11
BDS	36.19	10.93	37.82	9.98	1.88	.06	.15

Note. PSCP= Perceived Sociocultural Pressure; BDS= Body Dissatisfaction Scale

Table 4 finding revealed non-significant mean differences between public and private institute on perceived sociocultural pressure and body dissatisfaction when compared across public and private institute.

Table 5
 Comparison of Family System Along Perceived Sociocultural Pressure and Body Dissatisfaction (N=300)

Scale	Nuclear (n=153)		Joint (n=147)		t(298)	p	Cohen’s d
	M	SD	M	SD			
PSCP	33.77	9.52	34.89	7.15	-1.14	.25	.13
BDS	41.32	8.67	42.00	9.18	9.18	.51	.07

Note. PSCP= Perceived Sociocultural Pressure; BDS= Body Dissatisfaction Scale

Table 5 finding revealed non-significant mean differences between nuclear and joint family system on perceived sociocultural pressure and body dissatisfaction when compared through t-test.

Table 6
 Comparison of Residence Along Perceived Sociocultural Pressure, and Body Dissatisfaction (N=300)

Scales	Rural (n=128)		Urban (n=172)		t(298)	P	Cohen’s d
	M	SD	M	SD			

PSCP	34.56	8.19	34.15	8.65	.41	.67	.04
BDS	39.80	9.58	43.06	8.14	-3.17	.00	.38

Note. PSCP= Perceived Sociocultural Pressure; BDS= Body Dissatisfaction Scale

Table 6 finding revealed non-significant mean difference between nuclear and joint family system on perceived sociocultural pressure while significant mean difference between nuclear and urban residence on body dissatisfaction when compared across family system. Cohen’s d indicates small sized effect for the observed mean difference on body dissatisfaction.

Table 7

Comparison of Education Along Perceived Sociocultural Pressure and Body Dissatisfaction (N=294)

Scales	Bachelors (n=207)		M.Phil (n=87)		t (292)	p	Cohen’s d
	M	SD	M	SD			
PSCP	33.71	8.79	35.73	7.57	-1.87	.67	.24
BDS	42.08	9.59	41.45	8.65	-.54	.51	.06

Note. PSCP= Perceived Sociocultural Pressure; BDS= Body Dissatisfaction Scale

Table 7 finding revealed non-significant mean difference between Bachelors and M.Phil students on perceived sociocultural pressure and also no-significant mean difference between Bachelors and M.Phil students on body dissatisfaction when compared across education.

Table 8

One-Way Analysis of Variance on Perceived Sociocultural Pressure and Body Dissatisfaction across Current Year of University Education

Scales	First Year (n=74)		Second Year (n=120)		Third Year (n=51)		Fourth Year (n=55)		P	η ²
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
PSCP	34.58	7.68	36.09	8.08	34.50	7.27	29.96	9.80	.00	.06
BDS	41.77	9.22	42.53	9.96	41.41	7.72	39.90	6.86	.34	.05

Note. PSCP= Perceived Sociocultural Pressure; BDS= Body Dissatisfaction Scale

Table 8 indicates one-way ANOVA between groups for comparing participants scores along their current year of university education. Significant differences were observed along perceived sociocultural pressure when compared along current year of university education. Non-significant mean differences were observed across body dissatisfaction when compared along current year of university education.

Table 9

Linear Regression Analysis for the Effect of Perceived Sociocultural Pressure and Body Dissatisfaction (N=300): 95%CI

Predictors	B	S. E	β	t	p	LL	UL
Constant	27.97	2.02		13.98	.00	24.05	31.93
PSCP	.39	.05	.37	7.03	.00	.287	.510
R2	.14						
F	49.48						

Note: PSCP=Perceived Sociocultural Pressures=Confidence interval: Constant=Body Dissatisfaction:

Table 9 shows the impact of perceived sociocultural pressure and body dissatisfaction among female university students. The findings revealed that the perceived sociocultural pressure positively predicted body dissatisfaction. R square (R2) value of .14 indicates that the predictor (Perceived Sociocultural Pressure) described 14% of variance in the outcome variable (Body Dissatisfaction) with F=49.48. So, this score suggest that a high on perceived sociocultural pressure leads to increase in body dissatisfaction.

DISCUSSION

In the conducted research, the relationship between perceived sociocultural pressure and body dissatisfaction among female university students was examined. The study involved 300 female students from both public and private universities in Rawalpindi

and Islamabad. Utilizing the Perceived Sociocultural Pressure Scale and the Body Dissatisfaction Scale, the study aimed to measure these variables accurately. The reliability of these instruments was confirmed through Cronbach's alpha, indicating satisfactory results for the current sample.

Confirming the first hypothesis, the study found a positive correlation between perceived sociocultural pressure and body dissatisfaction, aligning with previous research (Myers and Crowther, 2007; Ricciardelli and McCabe, 2001)(33,23). This suggests that the more the participants perceived societal and cultural pressure regarding appearance, the higher their level of body dissatisfaction. This relationship was further supported by the findings of Smolak et al. (2001), which highlighted the significant impact of perceived sociocultural pressure on female students' well-being(49).

The study also explored the relationship between these variables and continuous demographics such as age and monthly family income. Contrary to expectations, a non-significant negative relationship between monthly family income and study variables was observed. This outcome indicates that higher family income does not necessarily reduce the tendency for body dissatisfaction, a finding that contrasts with common assumptions and lacks extensive previous research for comparison.

Regarding age, the study supported the second hypothesis, revealing a negative correlation between age and both perceived sociocultural pressure and body dissatisfaction. This finding is consistent with prior research, suggesting that these issues are more pronounced in late adolescence and early adulthood and tend to diminish with age (12,40). Holsen et al. (2012) also found a negative, albeit non-significant, relationship between these factors and age, reinforcing the notion that as individuals grow older, they become less influenced by sociocultural pressures and body dissatisfaction(20).

Linear regression analysis indicated that perceived sociocultural pressure positively predicted body dissatisfaction, resonating with Cash's findings(42). This implies that as perceived pressure increases, so does dissatisfaction with one's body, underscoring the significant role of societal influences in shaping body image perceptions.

Furthermore, the study observed that bachelor's level students reported higher levels of body dissatisfaction compared to M.Phil students. This suggests that educational level might influence how students perceive and react to sociocultural pressures concerning body image.

Another interesting finding was that students from joint family systems reported higher levels of perceived sociocultural pressure and body dissatisfaction compared to those from nuclear families. This could be attributed to the dynamics of joint families, where there might be more opportunities for social comparison and adherence to cultural norms, as suggested by Fistingher (1954)(31).

The study also revealed that urban residents exhibited higher body dissatisfaction than rural residents. This might be due to urban environments exposing individuals to more concentrated media influences and social interactions, as noted by Cash (2005)(42). This urban-rural discrepancy highlights the impact of environmental and cultural factors on body image perceptions.

A limitation of the study is the use of convenience sampling, which might not fully represent the diverse population of female university students in Pakistan. Additionally, the study focused only on female students, limiting its generalizability to other demographics. Future research could benefit from including a more diverse sample and exploring these relationships in different cultural contexts.

The findings have important implications for understanding the factors contributing to body dissatisfaction among young women. They underscore the need for interventions and educational programs that address the impact of perceived sociocultural pressure on body image, especially in educational settings. The study's insights can help in developing strategies to promote positive body image and reduce the harmful effects of societal beauty standards on young women's well-being.

CONCLUSION

This study delved into the intricate relationship between perceived sociocultural pressure and body dissatisfaction among female university students in Islamabad and Rawalpindi. It revealed a nuanced understanding of how sociocultural influences shape body image perceptions. The research demonstrated a non-significant relationship between these factors and age, suggesting that body dissatisfaction is not exclusively tied to younger age groups. Interestingly, it was observed that higher educational levels correlate with decreased body dissatisfaction, highlighting the potential role of education in shaping body image perceptions.

A critical finding of this study is the pronounced level of body dissatisfaction in participants from joint family systems compared to those from nuclear families. This underscores the influence of family dynamics and the social environment on body image concerns. However, the study's use of convenience sampling and its geographical limitation to Islamabad and Rawalpindi calls for caution in generalizing the findings. Future research should broaden its scope to include diverse demographics, encompassing different ethnicities, work statuses, and geographical locations. Involving parents or significant others in the data collection process could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the sociocultural factors contributing to body dissatisfaction.

The study's implications are far-reaching, particularly in terms of raising awareness about body dissatisfaction and its underlying causes. It emphasizes the need for early intervention and prevention strategies targeting adolescents, at a stage where beliefs and concerns about body image are still malleable. The findings serve as a foundation for further research in Pakistani culture, particularly in developing targeted approaches to address issues related to body dissatisfaction and self-perception.

The research provides insightful contributions to the understanding of perceived sociocultural pressure and body dissatisfaction among female university students, offering a platform for future studies and interventions aimed at mitigating these challenges in various cultural contexts.

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