

# Association between Body Image and Marital Satisfaction in Married Adults

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**Abstract:** *Objective:* To determine the association between body image and marital satisfaction in married adults.

*Study Design:* A Correlation/ Cross-sectional study

*Setting and Duration:* The study was carried out in Karachi, Pakistan, over a period of three months.

*Subjects and Methods:* The study was conducted after seeking approval from the Board of Advance Studies and Research (BASR), University of Karachi, Pakistan. A total sample of 200 married adults (100 males and 100 females) was selected purposively for the study. The age range of the target group was 22 to 40 years (mean age 34 years; SD=5.13) with minimum of 2 years and maximum of 20 years of marriage. Entire sample had middle socioeconomic status and their education level was from graduation and above. The subject completed the Demographic Information, Multidimensional Body Self-Relations Questionnaire (MBSRQ) and Kansas marital satisfaction scale. Responses were scored according to the producer given in the manuals.

*Results:* Mean  $\pm$  SD of age was 34.27 $\pm$ 7 years. Mean  $\pm$  SD of duration of marriage is 2 years and 5 months. Significant ( $P < .05$ ) correlation was found between body image and marital satisfaction among married adults and analysis of different variables of body image showed that fitness evaluation and body area satisfaction were positively correlated with marital satisfaction while appearance evaluation and subjective weight were negatively correlated. Above body image variables were also found to be significant predictors of marital satisfaction in married adults

*Conclusion:* It is to be concluded that body image is an important predictor in marital satisfaction.

**Keywords:** Body Image, Marital Satisfaction, Adults, married, body image variables.

## INTRODUCTION

The Perception of a person's about his/her body acts as a significant function in the growth of interpersonal relationships. Body image is a concept which received substantial attention in modern discussion and research [1]. Objective body appearance affects social interactions while subjective view about one's body also affects his/her emotion, thinking and behaviors. Subjective perception is more powerful impact than actual physical appearance. Person's Subjective view about his/her body is actually a person's body image [2]. Body image is a complex and multidimensional concept of the self consisting of the perception and experience of our bodies visually, mentally, emotionally and physically [3]. But literature indicates that little focused was on the relationship between body image dissatisfaction and interpersonal relationships in past researches. In every culture, both western and eastern people place great value on physical appearance, especially in context of relationships. When there is too much importance given to physical attractiveness by people and culture, and so it is not surprising that there will be a high rate of people with negative body image [3, 4].

Marital satisfaction is a mental state that reflects the perceived benefits and costs of marriage to a finicky individual. The high the person perceived the cost the less satisfied with marriage and marital partner. Same the greater the perceived benefits, the higher the satisfaction with marital partner and marriage. Physical appearance is a significant attribute to draw in another person or take a partner for marriage and romantic relationship. In the past few decades, the weight concerns and the importance of body shapes are becoming the norm and great emphases are placed on body image by both genders but risk is higher for adult females. Physical appearance and ideal body weight and shape have an important role in spousal relationships [5-7]. After marriage usually people gain weight and their physical appearance change, but the importance people give to physical attractiveness do not change after marriage, therefore with the passage of time partners feel dissatisfaction with their own body-shape and with their partner's body which lead to marital dissatisfaction. Perceived partner dissatisfaction with one's body lead to low level of satisfaction with romantic relationships [8]. Negative correlation found between body image dissatisfaction and romantic relationship. Furthermore, negative body image leads to fear of intimacy, anxiety and poor psychological health which in turn had a negative effect on romantic relationships [9].

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Sexual dissatisfaction is significant factors in marital dissatisfaction, which lead to poor relationships. People with negative body image experience lower level of sexual satisfaction [10-12]. Women were found to have more concern about different parts of body satisfaction as compare to overall body image, for example satisfaction with chest, thighs and hips. Another study Finding suggested that there are significant relationship between body image and romantic relationship and different aspects of body image were found to be predictors for self esteem and peer relationship [13, 14].

The literature indicated the significance of body dissatisfaction, but few studies conducted in the context of relationship satisfaction across the country on this topic, this study will add considerable knowledge. The relationships between these variables are of the interest because of the social, cultural pressure and media globalization people all over the world internalize ideal body image; individuals live in Pakistani culture of the present sample are more likely to experience negative body image which can lead to relationship dissatisfaction. Hence the aim of the present study was to expand upon previous researches by examining the link between marital satisfaction and body image variables in married adults and to explore this phenomenon in context of Pakistani culture. It was hypothesized that Body image would predict marital satisfaction in married adults.

## METHOD

### Participants

The sample of the present study consisted of 200 married adults (100 males and 100 females) was selected purposively for the study.

### Inclusion Criteria

- Participants aged 22-40 years
- All participants belonged to the middle socioeconomic class.
- Duration of marriage minimum of 2 years and maximum of 20 years.
- Educational level was from graduation and above.

### Exclusion Criteria

- The people belonged from lower and upper socioeconomic class.

- Known cases of mood/anxiety and other psychiatric illness.
- Sever obese people
- Pregnant women
- People with any chronic physical disease
- People regularly go to the gym

## Measures

### 1) Demographic Information Form

Demographic information form (Self developed) was included which consists of the information related to the participant's marital status, duration of marriage, age, income, occupation, gender, education, family structure, socioeconomic status, type of marriage (Love/Arrange), weight and height.

### 2) Multidimensional Body Self-Relations Questionnaire (MBSRQ, Cash, 2000) [15]

The Multidimensional Body Self-Relations Questionnaire (MBSRQ) is a 34-item self-report inventory it has six sub-scales that assess an individual's satisfaction with their appearance, body weight, shape and fitness, investment in appearance through grooming behavior and evaluates several components of one's overall body-image. It is a validated questionnaire for the assessment of body image. The respondent is required to use a Likert - type scale to indicate their level of agreement with the item where 1 (definitely disagree) to 5 (definitely agree). The MBSRQ subscales included; Appearance evaluation: feelings of physical attractiveness or unattractiveness; satisfaction or dissatisfaction with one's looks.

**Appearance orientation:** extent of investment in one's appearance. Higher scores reflect greater importance and attention to appearance.

**Fitness evaluation:** feelings of being physically fit or unfit.

**Fitness orientation:** extent of investment in being physically fit or athletically competent. High score reflects actively involved in activities to enhance fitness.

**Body areas satisfaction scale:** satisfaction with different body parts such as hair, skin color and lower torso.

**Subjective weight:** this scale assesses a construct reflecting fat anxiety, weight vigilance, dieting and eating restraint.

Cronbach alpha for the subscales are: Appearance evaluation and Appearance orientation; .88, Fitness evaluation; .77, Fitness orientation; .91, Body areas satisfaction; .77 and Subjective weight is .73.

### 3) *The Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMS, Schumm, 1983) [16]*

The Kansas Marital Satisfaction (KMS) scale is short three item self-reported scale. It is designed to quickly assess marital satisfaction. KMS assess satisfaction with spouse, marriage and relationship satisfaction with spouse. It is a valid and reliable scale to differentiate between satisfied and dissatisfied spouses. It has high internal consistency cronbach's alpha >.95. Respondents required indicating their relationship satisfaction on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (extremely dissatisfied) to 7 (extremely satisfied).

#### Data Collection

The study was conducted after seeking approval from the Board of Advance Studies and Research (BASR), University of Karachi, Pakistan. For data collection Official permission was taken and briefly explains the purpose of the research to the authorities of different organizations located in Karachi. Participants were also told the ethics of research; informed consent, they voluntarily participation, the matter of confidentiality and right to with drawl from the

study. Then subject completed the Demographic Information, Multidimensional Body Self-Relations Questionnaire (MBSRQ) and Kansas marital satisfaction scale. Responses were scored according to the producer given in the manuals.

#### Data Analysis

Data was analyzed with SPSS version 21. Descriptive statistics of frequencies, percentages and means were calculated for the demographic variables of age, gender and family structure, duration and type of marriage, birth order, education and occupation. Linear Regression analysis was done to analyze that body image predicts marital satisfaction in married adults.

#### RESULTS

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics, mean and standard deviation of age and duration of marriage. Table 2 describes the descriptive statistics of sub-scales of body image. The findings of linear regression presented in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 1 show that the mean age of the sample is 34.27 years, and mean duration of marriage is 2 years and 5 months.

#### Body Image Predicts Marital Satisfaction in Married Adults

The variables of body image and marital satisfaction were included in a linear regression analysis to

**Table 1: Mean Age, Height, Weight and Duration of Marriage**

Variables	N	M	SD
Age (years)	200	34.27	5.13
Duration of marriage (years)	200	2.5	1.26

**Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Sub-Scales of Multidimensional Body Self-Relations Questionnaire and the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale**

Variables	N	M	SD
Multidimensional body self-relations questionnaire sub-scales			
Appearance evaluation	200	11.84	4.19
Appearance orientation	200	24.46	2.81
Fitness evaluation	200	7.05	1.91
Fitness orientation	200	24.08	3.23
Subjective weight	200	8.70	2.31
Body areas satisfaction	200	30.65	6.64

**Table 3: Model Summary of Linear Regression Analysis**

Predictor	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F	p
				Change	
AE	.231 <sup>a</sup>	.053	.048	11.142	.001
FE	.165 <sup>a</sup>	.027	.022	5.571	.019
SW	.295 <sup>a</sup>	.087	.082	18.870	.000
BAS	.554 <sup>a</sup>	.307	.303	87.628	.000

**Table 4: Coefficients**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	p
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	Constant	19.385		1.354	14.321	.000
	AE	-.375	.112	-.231	-3.338	.001
2	Constant	12.658		1.006	12.584	.000
	FE	-.325	.138	.165	2.360	.019
3	Constant	19.120		.993	19.252	.000
	SW	-.479	.110	-.295	-4.344	.000
5	Constant	5.349		1.049	5.097	.000
	BAS	.313	.033	.554	9.361	.000

P<0.01\*\*; p<0.05\*.

evaluate the contribution of body image variables in the prediction of marital satisfaction among married adults. Results are shown in Tables 3 and 4.

Body Image (AE: Appearance Evaluation, FE: Fitness Evaluation, FO, SW: Subjective weight and BAS: Body area satisfaction (constant)

Marital satisfaction (Dependent variable)

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of the present study was to explore the relation between body image and marital satisfaction in married adults. The results from this study suggest that marital satisfaction is linked in important ways with body image, but that are related to psychological processes operate differently for males and females. Furthermore an analysis of different variables of body image found that fitness evaluation and body area satisfaction were positively correlated with marital satisfaction while appearance evaluation and subjective weight were negatively correlated; which suggested that people hardly evaluate their appearance when they are more satisfied with their marital relationship. In line with this another study concluded that lower satisfaction of body image lead to increase the quality of interpersonal relationship [17].

The findings of the present study also suggest that people concerned more about their fitness and body weight because overweight/underweight and low physical fitness lead to marital dissatisfaction. The association between satisfied marital relationship and body image running in both directions; that people have a more satisfied marital relationship would have less dissatisfaction with their bodies or have better body image would predict more satisfied relationship. It can be explained like that satisfied relationship may provide a psychological buffer against sociocultural pressure to attain an ideal body image. Marriage can serve as either a risk or protective factor for an individual physical and mental health. As Social norms theory suggested that people who failed to achieve the ideal body weight and shape experience high level of marital satisfaction while marital exchange theory concluded the opposite; according to this theory overweight people know that their value is low in the marriage market that is why they maintain good relationship and happy with their current partner [18].

Perception, evaluation and comments of a partner about one's weight and body image have significant effects on a person's marital satisfaction and dissatisfaction [19]. There is a relationship between marital satisfaction and body image; however, women's

body image affect more in romantic relationship than men and moreover, when women perceived that their partners are satisfied with their body weight and shape so they develop a more positive body image. Sometime people do not have overall body dissatisfaction, but have a negative evaluation of specific body parts which affect negatively their marital relationship. Same results found in the present study where males and females both were found to have more concerned about body parts satisfaction as compare to other variables of body image which suggested that people feel dissatisfied from specific parts of the body which negatively affect their overall self-concept [20, 21].

It has been observed that individual with negative body image have less concern to improve their bodies and health because in general, they failed to act and feel in a positive way about their appearance which in turn negatively affect their satisfaction within intimate relationships [22].

There have been limited research on the relationship between marital satisfaction and body image, particularly in developing country like Pakistan. We conducted a systematic review and found no studies pertaining association between body image and marital satisfaction. Pakistan is 97% Muslim majority country with high regard for traditional Islamic values. Most northeastern regions are remaining highly conservative and dominated by old regional tribal customs. With regards to female fashion, though, most women dress in accordance with Islamic tradition, fully covered and with loose fitting clothes. Pakistan is conservative country in which people feel hesitate to express concerns over the body, especially females. This study highlighted the importance of body image in the context of a marital relationship in Pakistan. Therefore, further studies need to be carried out in the cities of Pakistan to shed more light on this issue.

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Received on 04-07-2016

Accepted on 07-08-2016

Published on 07-11-2016

<http://dx.doi.org/10.6000/1927-5129.2016.12.65>

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