

## Self-Concept Measures Among Obese and Non-Obese Malaysian Adolescents

Mohd Khairi Zawi and Elizabeth Chong

Faculty of Educational Studies  
Universiti Putra Malaysia  
43400 UPM, Serdang, Selangor  
Malaysia

E-mail of Corresponding Author: [khairi@educ.upm.edu.my](mailto:khairi@educ.upm.edu.my)

**Key words:** obesity, self-concept, physical, adolescent.

### Introduction

Social stigma associated with obesity is widely believed to have a negative effect on an individual's self-concept (Kim, Sweeney & Janosky, 1991). On a broader perspective, the existence of an inverse relationship between an individual's psychological status and obesity (where greater obesity means lower status) prevails in the modern society. This effect seemed influenced by the negative cultural view towards obesity in almost every civilized culture. Adolescents have been noted to show preference for a mesomorphic build (Dwyer & Myer, 1968) and to a certain extent, an anorexic look, as exhibited by current modeling trends. Coupled by the aversion of general adolescent population toward endomorphic to obese build, such negative view of obesity seemed evident among young individuals. This study compares self-concept measurements of obese and non-obese Malaysian adolescents, with specific purpose of evaluating levels of self-concept in obese adolescents.

### Materials and Methods

Four hundred adolescents (200 males and 200 females); 13-15 age range) from various states in the Peninsular, were randomly included in this study. Classification of obesity was based on Body Mass Index (BMI) measurements. The test instrument used in this study was the Tennessee Self-concept Scale ( $r = 0.90$ ) which provides a multidimensional measure of self-concept profile as follows: (i) identity, (ii) self-satisfaction, and (iii) behaviour, which represent internal self-concept variables, and (iv) physical, (v) ethics-moral, (vi) self, (vii) social, (viii) family, and (ix) self-criticism, which repre-

sent external self-concept variables. Combination of these variables yielded 3 response categories with a total of 18 subscales (6 subscales in each category). Participants were required to complete the questionnaire as it was administered. Data was subjected to a  $2 \times 6$  (Group  $\times$  Self-concept subscale) ANOVA (repeated measures on the second factor) for testing differences among groups. The significance level was predetermined at 0.05.

### Results and Discussion

Results did not yield significant among obese and non-obese adolescents in all internal and external self-concept subscale combinations [ $df(1,398) = 6.49$ ;  $p = 0.01$ ]. These findings are partially supported by studies of Brantley et al. & Clifford (1976), Dekel et al., Tenenbaum, & Kudar (1996), Kaplan & Wadden (1986), and Mendelson & White (1995). Within the confines of this research, two probable factors that contributed to the non-significant difference between obese and non obese in terms of their perception of self concept, are; a. the constant increase of obese population among Malaysian adolescents desensitizes 'psychological' problems associated with the obese phenomenon. B. Obese adolescent come from families with high number of obese members, hence, obesity being accepted as a common phenomenon.

### Conclusions

The measurements of self-concept indicated that Malaysian obese adolescents did not possess negative perceptions with regard to personal values related to self-esteem. However, their significantly lower scores in the satisfaction-physical dimension suggested their inferior perception in terms of

perceived physical ability, and element that involves social interaction. In summary, a beneficial form of psychological intervention ought to incorporate the advocacy of an active lifestyle.

### Benefits from the study

This study provided preliminary insight into the mentality of typical Malaysian adolescents towards obesity and the physiological and psychological risks associated with the phenomenon. It also provides a framework of their probable perceptual values as related to the social implications resulting from being an obese individual. While this may add to the literature on obesity and adolescence, a more significant contribution is the provision of the foundation; an important basis for further extension of this study.

### Literature cited in the text

- Brantley, H.T. & Clifford, E. 1976. Cognitive self-concept and body image measures of normals, cleft palate and obese adolescents. *Cleft Palate Journal*. 13: 419-420
- Dekel, Y., Tenenbaum, G. & Kudar, K. 1996. An exploratory study on the relationship between postural deformities and body image and self esteem in adolescents. *International Journal Of Sport Psychology*. 27: 183-196.

### Project Publications in Refereed Journals

None.

### Project Publications in Conference Journals

None.

### Graduate Research

None.