



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Understanding body dysmorphia in students: an exploratory study at the Universidad Regional Autónoma de los Andes

Comprendiendo la dismorfia corporal en estudiantes: un estudio exploratorio en la Universidad Regional Autónoma de los Andes

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: the idealization of physical beauty profoundly influences personal and social perception, generating body image disorders that negatively impact the mental and physical health of individuals.

Objective: to determine the impact of body dysmorphia in students of the Universidad Regional Autónoma de los Andes.

Methods: observational, descriptive study, developed at the Universidad Regional Autónoma de los Andes, in a sample of 50 students. A survey adapted from the Body Shape Questionnaire was used to collect data on body perception. The results were processed by descriptive statistics and represented in tables, with voluntary participation through informed consent.

Results: 46,8 % of the students have never felt bothered by physical examinations. Thirty-eight percent have considered going on a diet, and 39,2 % are afraid of becoming fat sometimes. 55,7 % do not think they have disproportionate body parts while 31,6 % almost always feel insecure about having loose skin. While 50,6 % have never felt bad enough about their figure to cry about, the rest have. 27,8 % never compare themselves physically with others, while 36,7 % are aware of their body next to thin people.

Conclusions: the research reveals that body image is a common concern among university students, generating insecurities that affect their self-esteem and mental health. Social influence, aesthetic pressure and the need for educational and psychological interventions in the academic environment to improve well-being and reduce body dissatisfaction are highlighted.

Keywords: Body Image; Mental Health; Body Dysmorphic Disorders.

RESUMEN

Introducción: la idealización de la belleza física influye profundamente en la percepción personal y social, generando trastornos de la imagen corporal que impactan negativamente la salud mental y física de las personas.

Objetivo: determinar el impacto de la dismorfia corporal en estudiantes de la Universidad Regional Autónoma de los Andes.

Métodos: estudio observacional, descriptivo, desarrollado en la Universidad Regional Autónoma de los Andes, en muestra de 50 estudiantes. Se recurrió al empleo de una encuesta adaptada del Body Shape Questionnaire para recolectar datos sobre la percepción corporal. Los resultados fueron procesados mediante estadística descriptiva y representados en tablas, con participación voluntaria mediante consentimiento informado.

Resultados: el 46,8 % de los estudiantes nunca se ha sentido molesto por exámenes físicos. El 38 ha considerado hacer dieta, y un 39,2 % teme volverse gordo algunas veces. El 55,7 % no cree tener partes del cuerpo desproporcionadas mientras un 31,6 % casi siempre se siente inseguro por tener la piel poco firme. Aunque el 50,6 nunca se ha sentido tan mal por su figura como para llorar, el resto sí. El 27,8 % nunca se compara físicamente con otros, tomando el 36,7 % conciencia de su cuerpo junto a personas delgadas.

Conclusiones: la investigación revela que la imagen corporal es una preocupación común entre universitarios, generando inseguridades que afectan su autoestima y salud mental. Se destaca la influencia social, la presión estética y la necesidad de intervenciones educativas y psicológicas en el entorno académico para mejorar el bienestar y reducir la insatisfacción corporal.

Palabras clave: Imagen Corporal; Salud Mental; Trastorno Dismórfico Corporal.

INTRODUCTION

The constant pursuit of beauty and physical perfection has deeply permeated society, both in the present and in the past. Body aesthetics has become a determining factor in self-perception and how we are perceived by others. However, this beauty ideal can trigger body image disorders, which significantly affect people's physical and mental health.⁽¹⁾

Efforts to achieve an idealized body can lead to extreme practices, such as strict diets or the use of medications, which drastically alter body composition and normal functioning. These practices can result in loss of muscle mass, decreased skin tone, and a body weight below a healthy level, indicating a lack of adequate and balanced nutrition.⁽²⁾

Body dysmorphia is one of the most significant disorders related to distorted body image perception. It manifests as excessive concern about perceived body defects, which may be nonexistent or minimal from an objective perspective. These disorders not only affect self-perception but can also significantly influence physical and mental health.⁽³⁾

It is important to recognize that body image disorders can arise for a variety of reasons, including social pressure, media influence, and genetics. The predisposition to accumulate fat or have a slow metabolism can lead to the adoption of unhealthy behaviors in an attempt to achieve the beauty standards imposed by society.⁽⁴⁾ These disorders, being complex psychological conditions, affect a person's perception of their own body and appearance, bringing with them significant consequences for both the physical and mental health of affected individuals. It is essential to address them comprehensively, recognizing both their causes and their implications in daily life. Taking into account the above, the present research was carried out, which aimed to determine the impact of body dysmorphia on students at Los Andes Regional Autonomous University.

METHODS

An observational, descriptive, exploratory study was conducted at Los Andes Regional Autonomous University. Given the nature of the study, a non-probability, convenience sampling approach was used to select a sample of 50 students who met the selection criteria (agreeing to participate in the study by signing an informed consent form).

Data collection was conducted through a survey adapted from the Body Shape Questionnaire.⁽⁵⁾ This survey provided the data needed to describe students' perceptions. Descriptive statistics were used for processing, and tables were used for representation.

The principles of medical ethics and the aspects established in the Declaration of Helsinki were followed. Informed consent was obtained from participants, and this research was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Universidad Regional Autónoma de los Andes.

RESULTS

The survey results reveal diverse perceptions and behaviors related to body image among participants. Table 1 shows the survey findings by domain.

Table 1. Various perceptions and behaviors related to body image.

Domain	Result
Physical examination	46,8 % of participants have never felt annoyed or angry about performing physical exams, while the rest have experienced this feeling to a greater or lesser extent.
Concern about diet	38 % of respondents have sometimes considered dieting, while 21,5 % have never worried about becoming overweight and 6,3 % always have this concern.
Perception of body parts	55,7 % have never thought that parts of their body are larger than the rest of their bodies, while 2,5 % almost always or always have this perception.
Insecurity about skin	31,6 % almost always feel insecure about untuned and unfirm skin, while 1,3 % almost always feel worried about this problem and 2,5 % always encounter problems with their skin.
Negative feelings about body shape	50,6 % of participants have never felt so bad about their body shape that they have had to scream or cry, while the rest have experienced these feelings at some point.
Fear of gaining weight	39,2 % have sometimes been afraid of becoming overweight, while 21,5 % have never worried about this issue and 5,1% always have this concern.
Avoidance of activities due to skin concerns	62 % of respondents never avoid jogging because of concerns about loose skin, while 11,4 % sometimes avoid it and 2,5 % always do so for this reason.
Comparison with other people	27,8 % never or almost never compare themselves to other people and feel disadvantaged by their physical appearance, while 26,6 % sometimes do so and 3,8 % always compare themselves.
Awareness of body state	36,7 % have become conscious of their body shape when being around a thin person, while 24,1 % have sometimes considered it and 2,5 % always think about their body shape in this situation.
Feelings about being naked	43 % have never felt fat or overweight when naked, while 26,6 % have sometimes had this feeling and 2,5 % always feel this way.
Imagination of body modifications	20,3 % have never imagined modifying parts of their body, while 36,7 % have sometimes considered it and 7,6 % always imagine modifying areas of their body.
Feelings when eating	50,6 % have never felt fat from eating even small amounts of food, while 13,9 % sometimes experience these feelings and 3,8 % always do.

DISCUSSION

Body image concerns have been a central theme in contemporary society, influenced by aesthetic ideals and social pressures. In this context, body image disorders, such as body dysmorphia, have emerged as a relevant phenomenon, especially among the university population. This analysis focuses on examining the preliminary results of a survey conducted among university students regarding their body image perception, with the aim of understanding the complex relationship between physical perception, social pressures, and emotional well-being.⁽⁶⁾

The theoretical framework establishes the context for understanding the importance of this study. From ancient times to the present, society has valued physical beauty, which has generated an obsessive pursuit of aesthetic perfection. This obsession can lead to body image disorders, such as body dysmorphia, which is characterized by a pathological preoccupation with perceived defects in physical appearance. This preoccupation goes beyond simple dissatisfaction and can have serious repercussions on individuals' emotional and social well-being, especially in the university context.⁽⁷⁾

Analysis of the survey results reveals several significant trends. A considerable percentage of students were found to have considered dieting due to concerns about their physical appearance. This reflects the constant pressure to conform to certain aesthetic standards prevailing in society. Furthermore, a significant proportion of students were observed to feel insecure about the firmness and tone of their skin, suggesting a widespread concern about physical appearance beyond body weight, as reported by Cortés Mujica,⁽⁸⁾ in his study.

Another relevant finding is that many students experience negative comparisons with others in terms of their physical appearance. This highlights the impact of social norms and beauty ideals on individuals' self-image. Furthermore, it was observed that being in an environment where people are perceived as thinner can increase awareness of one's own body shape, indicating a particular sensitivity to social comparisons related to physical appearance.⁽⁹⁾

The survey also revealed that being naked can trigger feelings of discomfort and self-consciousness in some students, suggesting a lack of acceptance and comfort with their bodies. This may have important implications for students' emotional health and overall well-being. Importantly, these preliminary results offer an initial glimpse into the state of body image among college students, but they also raise important questions that require more detailed research. For example, the underlying causes of body image concerns among students, as well as their impacts on daily life and academic performance, need to be further explored.^(10,11)

It is crucial to consider the study's limitations, such as the cross-sectional nature of the data and the representativeness of the sample. These factors may affect the generalizability of the results and a complete understanding of body image in the university context.

CONCLUSIONS

The research reveals that body image is a significant and widespread concern among university students, influenced by social norms and aesthetic ideals. The results show a high prevalence of body insecurities, such as pressure to diet, skin dissatisfaction, and discomfort with nudity. These concerns negatively affect self-esteem, mental health, and overall well-being. Furthermore, the tendency to compare oneself with others exacerbates body dissatisfaction. The study concludes that addressing this issue in the university setting is essential through educational and psychological interventions, while acknowledging the limitations of the study.

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