

## Determinants of Body Image Perceptions among College Students in Kenya

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### ABSTRACT

Body-image may be defined as a multidimensional concept that represents how individuals think, feel, and behave with regard to their own physical attributes. Individuals are described as having either a negative or positive body image. Those with negative body image are often dissatisfied with their bodies. Body image dissatisfaction might affect an individual's eating behaviors and may have negative effects on academic performance, especially, the cognitive and problem solving abilities. Many college studies find themselves in conflicting body image issues due to the changes that take place at that time. If the issue of body image dissatisfaction among college students is not given attention, then it may affect their esteem hence academic performance. The purpose of this study was to determine body image status of college students in middle level college and establish the factors that determine the body image perception. A cross-sectional study was done at Shamberere Technical Institute in Kakamega County Kenya. A sample of 156 respondents, 60 were male and 96 female was drawn from the student population. The sample was drawn proportionately from the different department. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data. A Maynard questionnaire was used to determine those with negative and positive body image. Data was analyzed using SPSS version 18 for analysis. Chi-square tests were done to determine the difference between those with negative and positive body image on the measured factors. Statistical significance was set at  $p < 0.05$ . Seventy two (72%) of the respondents had positive body image. Both male and female respondents had body image issues with no significant difference ( $p > 0.05$ ). A significant majority of respondents who were day scholars 32 (73%) had negative body image ( $p < 0.05$ ). Influence from Friends was found to be significantly associated with body image perceptions ( $p < 0.05$ ). The study concluded that body image issues affect both male and female and friends may play a major role in determining an individual's perceptions about body image.

**Keywords:** Body image perceptions, Negative body image, positive body image, friends

### INTRODUCTION

Body-image may be defined as a multidimensional concept that represents how individuals think, feel, and behave with regard to their own physical attributes (1). In a study, (2) describe body image in two facets of body image: the level of satisfaction with one's physical appearance and the importance of appearance in relation to one's sense of self. However, in their study the majority of respondents were women, making the sample non-representative.

For many college students, several factors affect their behavioral habits including diet and exercise, new-found independence, together with stress from school and work are some of the factors (3). Body image dissatisfaction might affect an individual's eating behaviors and may have negative effects on academic performance,

especially, the cognitive and problem solving abilities (4). According to (5), negative body image could also lead to conditions like as anxiety, depression, lowered self-esteem, sexual dissatisfactions, and less satisfaction at work and in relationships. College and university women are exposed to mixed messages regarding their value as students and the importance of attractiveness (6). Weight and body shape of an individual always influence the sense of self-worth (7). To most college students especially women this is a time of many societal expectations both socially and intellectually. These expectations are bound to define them and in a bit to conform to the expectation may find themselves in confusion and distort their body image (8). Men also have body image issues. Male body image is explained as, a pathological preoccupation with muscularity, which is an increasingly pre-

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occupation among Western males (9). The purpose of this study was to determine body image status of college students in middle level college and establish the factors that determine the body image perception

### METHODS

This was a cross-sectional study done at Shamberere Technical institute in Kakamega County Kenya a middle level college in western region of Kenya. The study involved 156 students 60 male and 96 female. The students were drawn proportionately from the departments. Sampling was done randomly. A structured questionnaire was used to collect

**Table1.** *Maynard questionnaires*

Variable	Body image		$\chi^2$	Df	p
	Positive n=112 n(%)	Negative n =44n%			
1. Have you avoided sports or working out because you didn't want to be seen in gym clothes? Yes No	12(11) 100(89)	12(27) 32(77)	6.653	1	0.012
2. Does eating even a small amount of food make you feel fat? Yes No	08(7) 104(93)	12(27) 32(73)	11.453	1	0.001
3. Do you worry or obsess about your body not being small thin or good enough? Yes No	00(0) 112(100)	08(18) 36(82)	21.464	1	0.001
4. Are you concerned your body is not muscular or strong enough Yes No	24(21) 88(79)	36(82) 08(18)	46.674	1	0.0001
5. Do you avoid wearing certain clothes because they make you feel fat? Yes No	12(11) 100(89)	24(55) 20(45)	34.188	1	0.0001
6. Do you feel badly about yourself because you didn't like your body? Yes No	0(0) 112(100)	16(36) 28(64)	45.382	1	0.0001
7. Have you ever disliked your body? Yes No	04(4) 108(96)	20(46) 24(54)	42.588	1	0.0001
8. Do you want to change something about your body? Yes No	04(4) 108(96)	24(54) 20(46)	55.735		
9. Do you compare yourself with others and come up short Yes No	20(18) 92(82)	32(73) 12(27)	42.799	1	0.0001

Table 1 shows the results on the Maynard questionnaire. The responses of the respondents

data. A Maynard questionnaire was used to determine those with negative and positive body image. Data was coded and entered into SPSS version 18 for analysis. Chi-square tests were done to determine the difference between those with negative and positive body image on the measured factors. Statistical significance was set at  $p < 0.05$ .

### RESULTS

A questionnaire recommended by (10) was used to measure body image. Respondents who answered 'yes' in more than three questions were classified as having negative body image.

were compared There was a significant difference ( $p < 0.05$ ) between the respondents

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with positive and those with negative body image in the responses to the questions on the Maynard questionnaire (Table 1)

**Table 2.** Socio demographic characteristics of the respondents

Variable	Positiven=112 n(%)	Negative n=44 n(%)	$\chi^2$	Df	P
<b>Age</b>			5.107	2	0.078ns
18-25	100(89)	44(100)			
25-30	08(7)	0			
>30	04(4)	0			
<b>Gender</b>			1.266	1	0.27ns
Male	40(36)	20(46)			
Female	72(64)	24(54)			
<b>Department</b>			18.702	4	0.0001
Engineering	20(18)	0			
Institutional Management	16(14)	12(27)			
Agriculture	36(32)	08(19)			
Business	28(25)	12(27)			
Information Technology	12(11)	12(27)			
<b>Year of study</b>			2.009	2	0.366
First	52(46)	24(55)			
Second	40(36)	16(36)			
Third	20(18)	04(9)			
<b>Level of study</b>			1.515	2	0.469ns
Artisan	52(46)	16(36)			
Certificate	40(36)	20(46)			
Diploma	20(18)	08(18)			
<b>Place of residence</b>			6.636	1	0.008s
Boarder	56(50)	12(27)			
Day scholar	56(50)	32(73)			

ns – not significant s - significant

Table 2 represents the socio demographic characteristics of the respondents. Most respondents were aged between 18-25 years. Both male and female respondents had body image issues with no significant difference ( $p > 0.05$ ). Most of the respondents with negative body image were from the departments of Institutional Management, Agriculture, Business, Information Technology.

No student from the Engineering department with negative body image. The year of study had no influence on the body image. Respondents from all years of study were affected. The level of study did not also influence body image as there was no significant difference. A significant majority of respondents who were day scholars 32(73%) had negative body image ( $p = 0.008$ ,  $\chi^2 = 6.636$ )

**Table 3.** Factors that influence body image perceptions

Variable	Positive n=112 n(%)	Negative n=44 n(%)	$\chi^2$	Df	p
<b>Media</b>			0.261	1	0.370
Yes	56(50)	20(45)			
No	56(50)	24(55)			
<b>Family</b>			0.261	1	0.370
Yes	56(50)	24(55)			
No	56(50)	20(45)			
<b>Friends</b>			6.698	1	0.008
Yes	36(32)	24(55)			
No	76(68)	20(45)			
<b>Health professionals</b>			2.992	1	0.061
Yes	44(39)	24(55)			
No	68(61)	20(45)			

Media family and health professionals had no influence on body image perceptions since there was no significant difference between those with positive and negative body image

( $p > 0.05$ ). However, most respondents with negative body image 24(55%) indicated that

they are influenced by friends ( $p = 0.008$ ,  $\chi^2 = 6.698$ )

## DISCUSSION

Based on gender, both male and female had body image issue as there was no significant

difference between the groups, this is consistent with other studies. According to (11), between 17% and 30% of boys want to be slimmer, between 13% and 48% desire a larger body size indicating a dissatisfaction with their bodies.

Some studies found out that females present greater body dissatisfaction than males (12,13). According to (13) although males and females are dissatisfied with their bodies, the variables which mediate their body dissatisfaction are different. Whereas this study used the Maynard body image questionnaire to determine those with body dissatisfaction the above authors used the Figure Rating Scale developed by (12). All students in the department of engineering had positive body image as opposed to students from other departments. This could be attributed to the busy schedule of the engineering which can hardly allow them to think of their body image. Most students with negative body image 32(73%) were not living in the college hostels. This would be attributed to pressure society outside the college environment puts on the young people on body image issues.

The media has been reported to have an impact on the individual's negative feelings toward their bodies. Most studies have reported a significant contribution of media on body image perceptions among young people (5, 14). However, this study did not find any significant contribution of media towards body image perceptions. The inconsistency in the results could be attributed to the setting the studies were done, whereas this study was done in the rural setting of a developing country, the other studies were done in Western countries. In this study, friends were found to be significantly associated with body image perceptions. Friends play an important role in one's life and most people would want to go with what is approved by their peers.

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