

Weight Perception and Weight Loss Practices among College Girls of City of South India

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ABSTRACT

The present study explored the weight perception and weight loss practices of the college girls in Chennai. Being a metropolitan city, Chennai college girls concentrate more on fitness and weight loss practices. But unfortunately many girls do not follow the correct methods of weight loss practices. Due to wrong practices and perceptions, they are more prone to macro and micro nutrient deficiencies. About 500 college going girls were randomly selected, interview schedule was used to collect the information about their weight perception and weight loss practices. Obtained information was subjected to statistical analysis. Our study reported that only about 36% mentioned that they looked normal and about 32% want to maintain their present weight. Weight loss practices were followed by 45% of the participants. About 27% and 15% practiced increased physical activity pattern and reduced food intake respectively reduce weight. Slimming down was the reason mentioned by 43% of the participants to reduce weight. Nutrition Education programs must be conducted to impart nutrition knowledge to the students to follow correct nutritional practices.

Keyword: Body Image, Body weight, Eating pattern, Meal skipping, Weight loss, Zero Figure

INTRODUCTION

Body image is found to be associated with the perception of people on themselves. One's perception does not always reflect reality, but understanding and predicting the behavior towards weight control is being determined by how adolescents perceived about their body weight. [1] It is reported in available literature that young adults do not have the

appropriate nutritional education and experience to make healthy food choices, while deficient skills in meal preparation alongside the irregular and demanding class schedule have also a critical effect in reorientation of a eating habits. [2] Compared to males, females were most aware in almost all aspects of nutritional knowledge and evaluation. Females have more nutritional knowledge, and they quite often show weaker nutritional attitudes regarding daily consumption of food meals and food groups in comparison with males. On one hand, it seems that some other influencing variables such as body image, psychological issues, food preferences, family dietary pattern, environmental factors influencing on children and adolescents' nutritional behavior are accountable for this discrepancy. On the other hand, scientists implies that less favorable attitude of adolescent girls may be due to their inclination to shed weight and remain slim which affects their food choices and amount of daily intake, causing weaker behaviors regarding daily food consumption despite of enough knowledge and awareness in this field. [3] Females are mostly abstemious in their eating habits for maintaining physical beauty that are at a greater risk of poor nutrition. [4]

Anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa were observed in underweight adolescents with attributes such as weight conscious behaviour, eating to escape from worries, habit of induced vomiting predominated their inclination towards the maintenance of body weight. [5]

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted among 500 college going females. Subjects were selected using random sampling method from Government and Government aided colleges of Chennai. Permission from college authorities was initially obtained to conduct the study. Written Consent was also obtained from the study participants and they were briefed about the study methodology. Interview schedule was used to collect the information on the weight perception and weight loss practices of the subjects. The questions like, “How do you look like”, “How do you want to appear”, “weight loss practices” were placed. The obtained details were coded and subjected to statistical analysis using SPSS version 20.0.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table-1: “How do you look like”?

How do you want to look like	Number	Percentage
Normal	181	36.2
Lean	175	35
Over weight	87	17.4
Don't know	57	11.4
Total	500	100

In the current study, about 36.2% perceived to have normal body weight. About 35% and 17.4% perceived to be lean and overweight respectively. About 11.4% of the subjects mentioned ‘don’t know’ with regarding to their perception to their look. A similar study showed that among 1652 samples, more than 50% of the students (N=826) recognized their body weight as normal while less than a quarter of the population perceived themselves to be overweight. [6]

Table-2: “How do you want to appear”?

How do you want to appear	Number	Percentage
Present size	164	32.8
Want to slim down	128	25.6
Want to gain weight	114	22.8
Don't know	94	18.8
Total	500	100

In the present study, about 32.8% want to maintain the same size, 25.6% and 22.8% want to slim down and gain weight respectively. Only 18.8% replied ‘don’t know’ for the question asked regarding appearance. In a study done by Gillen and

Lef kowitz (2011) male students were found to be more satisfied with their appearance than female students. Gillen and Lef kowitz also concluded that the perception of body image might improve after taking courses that encourage criticisms of unrealistic student activities that encourage positive body image. [7]

Table-3: Zero Figure practice of the participants

Zero Figure	Number	Percentage
Yes	22	4.4
No	478	95.6

“The zero figure is a western trend which means the girl will have a figure of 31.5-23-32”. Such an adventure can lead to complications during the pregnancy in later years of life. Trend of Zero figure might lead to an increase in an unhealthy obsession, over losing weight and the possible resultant damage to health of those concerned. [8]

Zero figure is an indicative of a general trend among college girls to be slimmer. It is heartened to note that only about 4.4% female populations want to be in zero figure.

Table-4: Weight loss practices of the past

Weight loss practices of the past	Number	Percentage
Yes	229	45.8
No	271	54.2
Total	500	100

From the above table, it is clearly evident that, about 45.8% of the study population tried to lose weight in the past. A study conducted by *Chavda (2013)* showed that almost one-third of girls were practicing very harsh weight control practices such as skipping of meals and snacks and not eating in between meals. It shows girls do not exhibit proper knowledge regarding weight control practices. [9]

Table-5: Weight loss methods followed by the participants

Weight loss methods followed	Number	Percentage
By not eating	96	4.9
By reducing intake	36	15.7
Vomiting after eating	22	9.6
Taking weight reducing supplement	11	4.8
Increasing physical activity	64	27.9
Total	229	100

The above table also showed that 4.9 % tried to lose weight by not eating, 15.7% of the participants reduced the food intake, 9.6% vomited after eating, 4.8% taken weight-reducing supplements and 27.9% performed physical activity to lose weight. According to a systematic review and meta analysis ‘increasing physical activity was the most frequented strategy and dieting was the second most assess strategy for weight loss. [10]

Table-6: Reasons for weight reduction

Reasons for weight reduction	Number	Percentage
Want to slim down	99	43.2
For health reasons	67	29.3
Social pressure	45	19.7
No reasons	18	7.9
Total	229	100

When the reasons to reduce weight were analyzed, it is clearly understood that about 43.2% wanted to slim down, 29.3% and 19.7 % reported health reasons and social pressure to reduce weight and only 7.9% mentioned no reason to reduce weight. A similar study also reported that, faulty body images were observed among girls. About 40% of girls perceived them as fat while only 30% were actually overweight. About 50% want to be little light in future. [9]

CONCLUSION

‘Today’s college-going girls are future mothers’, women involve in market production, home production and reproduction. In order to maintain the health of the future mothers the college-going girls should maintain the proper nutritional status. Nutrition education program must be carried out among college girls to follow proper nutrition habits and thereby correct nutritional status would be maintained. College girls with improper nutrition knowledge would practice wrong weight loss method and results in deficiencies. In order to avoid such conditions, it is the responsibility of the nutrition care givers to impart nutrition knowledge among students. This must be carried out with the help of

parents, college authorities and Government.

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