

## INFLUENCE OF SELF-CONCEPT AND MARITAL STATUS ON FEAR OF OVERWEIGHT AMONG FEMALES

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### ABSTRACT

*This study investigated influence of self-concept and marital status on fear of overweight among females. A total of 130 females, 77 married and 53 single were used for the study. The participants who were selected among inhabitants of Enugu North Local Government were within the age range of 22 - 45 years with a mean age of 33 years. Two sets of instruments, Fear of Overweight Scale and Self Concept Scale were used. 2 x 2 factorial design was adopted while two-way ANOVA statistics was used. Findings showed self-concept has a significant influence on fear of overweight  $F, (1, 126) = 11.8p <.01$ , marital status also has a significant influence on fear of overweight  $F, (1, 126) = 48.9 P <.01$ .) a significant interaction effect on self - concept and fear of overweight was also found  $F, (1, 126) = 2565, P <.01$ ). Findings were discussed in relation with the literature reviewed and recommendations were also made.*

**Keywords:** *Education, marriage, obesity, self-concept, wellbeing*

### INTRODUCTION

Overweight and obesity are now recognized worldwide as increasing public health problems throughout the life course and wrong perception of one's body size may reduce the motivation for an overweight person to lose weight (Akinpelu, Oyewole & Adekanla, 2015). Body image is a complex, multi-dimensional construct incorporating neurophysiologies and psychocultural components (Freeman, 2008). Despite the progress females have made toward gender equality, fear of overweight has been a body image issue that continues to plague women across the globe (Freeman, 2008). The damaging effect of fear of body weight can be seen in the forms of eating disorders (Anorexia Nervosa), lowered self-concept and decreased enjoyment in everyday activities (Cooly & Toray, 2001).

These issues have sparked a surge of research regarding the causes and effects of fear of overweight, interestingly much has not been done, especially in Nigeria with respect to self-concept and marital status as they affect fear of overweight. Based on this assertion, this study is geared towards determining the degree at which the aforementioned variables influence fear of overweight among females. The mass media, have consistently encouraged people to maintain ideal weights and for overweight people to take action aimed at reducing weight with a view to promoting health and general well-being. The unflattering portrayals of obese persons pervade popular culture, while multiple studies document that children, adults, and even health care professionals who work with obese patients hold negative attitudes toward overweight and obese persons (Crandall & Schiffhauer, 1998; Greenberg, Eastin, Hofshire, Lachlan & Brownwell, 2003).

According to Gboyega, Adekoya and Minerani (2014), fear of fatness or overweight can be viewed as the degree to which an individual is concerned about becoming



overweight or gaining weight. Many young people simply have come to dislike their bodies. They may feel fat and unattractive even if their reflection in the mirror shows otherwise. Fear of overweight is a term which may refer to a state of apprehension or fear with respect to one's body size (Valentine, 2009). It can also be described as a state of fear engendered by one's physical appearance which is based on how individuals see themselves when looking in a mirror, or when picturing themselves in their mind and their ideas about their body appearance or image describes how one perceives one's appearance to be in relation to others (American Psychiatry Association, 2007) which in many cases may be dramatically different from one's objective physical condition or how one is actually perceiving him/herself.

Self-concept is another factor that is likely to determine female's fear of overweight. Self-concept refers to an individual's overall self-evaluation and descriptive conceptualization that individuals make and maintain with regard to themselves. In this sense, self-concept is a personal evaluation reflecting what people think of themselves as individuals. According to Obidigbo (2004), self-concept reflects the degree to which the individual sees him/herself as a competent, need-satisfying individual, thus the high self-concept individual has a sense of personnel adequacy and a sense of having achieved need satisfactions in the past.

In addition to reflecting a cognition about oneself, Perham and Swann (2009) noted that self-concept also consists of an affective (liking/disliking) component. However, high self-concept people like who and what they are in terms of body size. Thus, people high in self-concept agree with statements like "I am a person of worth, on an equal plane with others" and "I am satisfied with myself image" (Roseberg, 2012). Despite the fact that numerous views on self-concept have been recorded, much is yet to be done in terms of like between self-concept and fear of overweight among females. In reaction to this research gap, this present study is structured to determine the effect of self-concept and marital status on fear of overweight among females. This study is aimed to determine the effect of self-concept on fear of overweight among females and to compare married and single females on fear of overweight.

Torastam (2009) in his work on factors that affect fear of overweight found that among 2002 females used in the study, body dissatisfaction decreased with increasing age, for women in particular. In addition, Anderson, Slyer Galuska, Brown and Brownson (2008) showed that advancing in age was associated with body size satisfaction. Roboussin (2011) reached a similar conclusion, finding positive associations for age and body size satisfaction. Therefore, the research in this area is missed and generally inconclusive although some early researchers have examined older adults and body image (Barscheld, Walster and Bolormstedt 2010) many researchers have criticized these and other studies for relying on survey-based research method. Despite the limitation of such studies early results have indicated that younger adults show evidence of the body dissatisfaction than do older adults (Fallon and Rozin, 2005).

Others studies have examined this question across the life span (Allez, Rernsterbn, Rouget, Archinord and Morabia 2008, Puner, Flen 2009, Stevens and Tiggeman 2008, Tiggeman and Linch 2001) concluding that body dissatisfaction for women in stable and tends to be high than the dissatisfaction observed in older men

(Berscheid 2003, Lamb, Jackson, Cassidy and Priest 2008, Rozin and Fallon 2008).

Mcguire (1991), studied self-concept in a longitudinal genetic study among 10 - 18 years adolescence, genetic factor explained 400/0 and non, shared environmental factors and 60% of the correlation in general self-worth between two times points from age 10 to 18 years. In the same vein, vies (2006) assessed genetics of self-esteem and its self-assessed stability in 10 - 19 years adolescent twins. In addition, he examined whether the two self-esteem components were subject to different genetic influences. Genetic and non-shared environmental influence were found to best explain the variance In level and perceived stability as well as the covariance's between the two components.

In the study of self-concept, Agu (2006) examined how self-concept and gender influences ideal body image of college students. 250 undergraduate students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, served as participants. In the study, using two-way analysis of variance as a statistical tool, the finding indicated that females differ significantly from males on ideal body image and that self-concept does not determine students ideal body image.

In another study on self-concept, Crocker and Part (2004) say that self-concept is the evaluations we make about how work we are as human beings. People spend a lot of time thinking about themselves trying to evaluate their own perceptions, opinions, values abilities, and the like (Mnssweiler 2003) and self-concept beliefs we hold about who we are and what characteristics we have. Many overweight people who clarion to way only normal amount of food eat more than they admit, maybe even more than they admit to themselves. In one admirably simple research, the researchers collected the supermarket receipts and found that overweight families bought more food per person than average families especially more high fat food (Ransley, Donnelly, Botham, Kahara, Greenwood and Cade 2003).

However, In addition to consuming more energy, they also have low energy output including a low metabolic rate. One group of investigations compared the infants of twelve's overweight mothers and six normal weight mothers over their first years of life. All the babies weighted about the same at birth but six of the babies of the overweight mothers were inactive compared to the other babies and become overweight within their first years. During their first 3 months, they expended about 20% less energy per day than the average weight families (Robert, Savage, Coward, Chew & Lucas 2008). Low energy expenditure is a good predictor of weight gain in adults as well (Roberts Etigal 2008). Eric (2008) found that the adult with the lowest energy expenditure over a 24-hour period were the most likely to gain weight over next 2 to 4 years.

In the United State, women in particular are unlikely to be satisfied with their own appearance, and the percentage of women expressing dissatisfaction has increased gradually over decades, even unattractive men are likely to say they are satisfied with their appearance and even attractive women say they are dissatisfied with their appearance (Feingold and Mazzella 2008). Dissatisfaction about one's body often translates into worries about eating especially in the United States of American. People become seriously in the United States of American. People become seriously overweight because they take in more calories than they use to.

The achievement and maintenance of thinness and beauty is a major issue to females, no wonder newspaper articles, TV shows, commercials, idealized role models and books are targeted at them a lot. It is important to consider individual differences in fear of fatness with a view to helping determine appropriate intervention. An important variable which, unfortunately has not received adequate attention in obesity research, is personality. Psychologists have demonstrated that certain personality factors help people to cope more effectively under various situations and make them less vulnerable to self-injurious behaviours. Despite the problems that are associated to overweight among females, in Nigeria, adequate research has not been conducted on fear of body weight with respect of marital status and self-concept, hence the need for the present study.

Researchers have consistently established that single women in North American are presumed to attain and maintain a thin body (Frederick, 2005). Singles women are inundated with the drive for thinness through the media and through the attitudes adopted by both women and men (Low 2003). Consequently, in a society bounded with media influences, most single women are dissatisfied with their body shape or weight and those who are not have become the exception rather than the rule (Rodin 2003).

Fear of overweight issues have led to body monitoring appearance anxiety, disordered eating habits. The degree of disturbed eating is highly correlated with negative body image. There is need to endorse socio-cultural beliefs regarding weight and appearance and interference of weight and appearance as it concerns with other life demands (Mintz and Betz 2008). Dissatisfaction with one's figures has been consistently found to increase body pathology. Body dissatisfaction can also affect women's relationship, social and emotional development, how they perceive self-worth (Culler, Rohrer and Behm, 2008; Kaplan Busner and Pollack 2008; Trigger Mann and Williamson 2000).

Nezlek (2009) observed that college women body image negatively affects their day-to-day social interaction. He also suggested that for, college women, self-perception of social attractiveness, were positively related to the confidences in themselves. Haris (2005) suggested that women's social, emotional and physical development may even be retarded by body image disturbances. His study showed that such disturbances can have a significance negative relationship with self-esteem, self-concept and beliefs about appearance (Guler, Johnston and Madsen 2007, Rodin 2003, Spangler 2002). In one study, high senior school students who perceived themselves to be of normal weight displayed greater self-concept than those who taught they were overweight. Interestingly women in the study specified tended to display greater self-concept if they were actually underweighted (Koplan 2008). These problems have also been observed in children at six years old. And have led to problems behaviour's such as body monitoring, social anxiety and unhealthy eating behaviours (Venereal and Theles,2000). Furthermore, this problem has constantly been reported as more prevalent among females than males.

Mints and Kashubeek (2009) found body Image to be poorer among females and its effects more damaging to females than males. Regardless of race, women report

more body image related problem attitudes and behaviours than men. Hoyt and Kogan (2001) found that women especially those under or above average weight were more dissatisfied with their appearance than men. Conner Green (2008) discovered that female dieted and took other weight loss measures more frequently than males. Furthermore, Triggemann and Williamson (2000) reported women exercising more for reasons of weight control ad tone than men.

### **Hypotheses**

1. There will be no significant influence of self-concept on fear of overweight among females.
2. There will be no significant influence of marital status on fear of overweight among females.

### **METHOD**

#### **Participants**

A total of one hundred and thirty females were used for the study. 77 (59.2%) of them were married while 53 (40.8%) were single. 65 (50%) have low self-concept while 65 (50%) have high self-concept. The participants who were selected from the inhabitants of Enugu North Local Government Area Enugu State were within the age range of 22 - 45 years with a mean age 33 years and a standard deviation of 6 years. All the participants were Christians from Igbo ethnic group.

#### **Instruments**

##### *Fear of overweight scale (Kagan 1984)*

The items were worded positively. Hence a least possible score of 14 and a highest possible score of 67 could be obtained by any given respondent.

The normative score for the instrument is 26.5 these indicate that score above 26.5 indicate greater concern over ones weight and diet. In addition, evidence of known group validity was found with differences in concern over weight score for subjects categorized as normal eaters, beryline eaters and disordered eaters (Kagan, 1984). In addition, Kagan (1984) obtained a Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of 0.88. It also has evidence of concurrent validity correlating with self-discipline and rebelliousness (Kagan,1984).

##### *Self-concept scale by Ezilo (1982)*

It is a 31-item design to measure various people see and feel about themselves by having them judge them against a series of descriptive scale. The items are in two dichotomous responses. The individual is expected to throw his/her response on the option that best describe him/her and use the response options to ascertain the degree. Hence a highest possible score of 217 and least possible score of 31 could be obtained. Thus, score below 93 indicate low self-concept while score above 93 indicate high self-concept. Hence Ezilo (1982) obtained a cronbach alpha reliability of 0.73. The researcher also obtained a test re-test reliability of 0.82 on the instrument. The instrument is said to be valid it has widely be used for Nigeria sample by different researchers (Okonkwo 2002, Maririe 2004).

**Procedure**

A total of 150 copies of the questionnaires were distributed within a period of four weeks to select participants for this study. First and foremost, the researcher divided Enugu North into three clusters of cluster. A comprising New Layout and Asata cluster B (New Haven) and cluster C independence layout. 50 copies of the instrument were administered to each cluster using simple random sampling technique. The participants were met in their various offices and home. On each participant the researcher introduces himself and his purpose. Individual administration of the questionnaires was carried by the researcher. The researcher administered the two set of instrument simultaneously. The self-concept questionnaire was to determine the self-concept of the participants while the fear of overweight questionnaire was to determine the degree of concern of weight and diet among the participants. Finally, out of the one hundred and fifty questionnaire that were distributed only 130 that were correctly filled and returned were used for study.

**Design/ Statistics**

Based on two independent variables self-concept: (low and high) and marital status: single and married with two levels each in relation to one dependent variable fear of overweight, the appropriate design adopted was 2 x 2 factorial design. However, two way analysis of variance (ANOVA) F, test was adopted as a statistical technique to test the hypotheses.

**RESULTS**

**Table I:** Summary table of mean on the influence of self-concept and marital status on fear of overweight among females.

|                     |             | <b>Marital status</b> |         |             |
|---------------------|-------------|-----------------------|---------|-------------|
|                     |             | Single                | Married |             |
| Low<br>Self-concept | X11 = 41.5  | X21 = 31.1            | —       | X .1 = 36.3 |
|                     | X12 = 49.21 | X22 = 36.0            | —       |             |
| High                | X .1 = 45.4 | X .2 = 33.6           |         | X .2 = 42.6 |

From table one above, female with high self-concept obtained a higher mean of 42.6 while their low self-concept counterpart had a lesser mean of 36.3. In addition, single female obtained a higher mean of 45.4 while their married counterpart obtained a lesser mean of 33.63. Since higher means indicates high level of fear of success, this indicate that female with high self-concept and single female manifest higher level of fear of overweight than those with low self-concept and married once respectively.

**Hypothesis II**

**Table II:** Summary table of two-way ANOW A on the influence of self- concept and marital status on fear of overweight among females.

| Source of variation | Sum of square | DF  | Mean of square | F      | P    |
|---------------------|---------------|-----|----------------|--------|------|
| Self concept (A)    | 1035.8        | 1   | 1035.8         | 11.8   | <.01 |
| Marital status (B)  | 4290.4        | 1   | 4290.44        | 48.9   | <.01 |
| A x B               | 224995.85     | 1   | 224995.89      | 2565.5 | <.01 |
| Within cell         | 11048.4       | 126 | 87             |        |      |

Table two above revealed that a statistically significant difference exist between females with low self-concept and those with high self-concept on fear of overweight [F, (1,126) = 11.8 P<.01]. Thus the first hypothesis which stated that there will be no significant influence of self-concept on fear of overweight was rejected. The table mean revealed that females with high self- concept fear over weight more than those with low self-concept. Result also show a statistically significance between single and married female on fear of overweight (F, (1,126) = 48.9<0.1]. Thus, the second hypothesis which stated that there will be no significant influence of marital status on fear of our weight was rejected. The mean table revealed that single female fear over weight more than their married counterpart. There was also a significant interaction effect [F, (1,126) = 2565 P<.01]. High self-concept single female fear overweight more than self-concept married females. Also, low self-concept single females fear over weight more than low self-concept married females.

### Summary of the Results

Findings of this study can be summarized as follows:

A significant difference on fear of overweight was observed between low and high self-concept females with those who have high self-concept manifesting higher degree on fear of over weight than those with low-self-concept. Marital status was also found to significantly influence fear of overweight among females with single females having higher degree of fear of overweight than their married counterpart. Also, a significant interaction effect of self-concept and marital status was observed on fear of overweight among females.

### DISCUSSION

Obviously the two hypotheses tested in this study yielded significant outcome. The first hypothesis which stated that self-concept will not significantly influence fear of overweight among females were rejected. In other words, self-concept as a factor yielded a significant influence on fear of overweight among females. This means that a female level of self-concept plays a vital role in determining her level of fear as it relates to overweight. The outcome of the study shows that females with high self-concept have higher fear of been over weight than those with low self-concept. However, this may be attributed to the behavior of people with high self- concept.

Individuals with high self-concept tend to be more conscious about themselves. They are always careful in everything endeavour. They always like to be at the positive angle in every endeavour. Therefore, this maybe a reason for their conscious of their body size. They tend to maintain good body size than with low self-concept. On the other hand, individuals with low self-concept care less about life. They are always nonchalant in their endeavours. They are not even worried on what people say about them. Unlike those with high self-concept who always enjoy praise and will always do everything within his/her capacity to maintain praise.

In line with the outcome of this study, Crocker and Pant (2004) reported that self-concept being a evaluation we make about how worth we are as human being an evaluation we make about how worth we are as human being could determine how we want to be seen. A condition that affects our behaviours and attitude. According to them, high self-concept individual will always like to maintain good worth than low concept, individuals. Other researchers that are in consonance with the outcome of this study include (Agu 2006; Macgruile 1999).

In addition, the second hypothesis which stated that marital/ status will not significantly influences fear of overweight was also rejected. In other words, marital status as a factor has a significant influence on fear of overweight among female. This indicates that been married or single will determine the level of fear a female adult will have with reference to overweight. The outcome of the study showed that those who are not yet married fear been overweight more than those who are married. However, one may attribute the reason for this outcome to the fact that females who are not yet married see themselves as those who should do everything possible to look beautiful in other to attract a husband.

Unlike the married female who believed that she has entered into a man's house. To majority of them, the essence of looking slim is to attract husband, once that is done, you may look anyhow. Though this is not application to all of them. Some still believe that is good to look slim than obese. Majority are afraid of overweight because they don't want to remain attractive to their husband always, while others see it as important for their health.

In line with the outcome of this study, Fredrick (1995) observed that single women in North American are presumed to attain and maintain a thin body. Low (2003) also reported that single women are inundated with fear of overweight and derive for thinness.

### **Implication of the Findings**

The study was able to explore the level of fear of overweight among female. The study through its empirical review showed higher prevalence of fear of overweight among female than male. A situation that may be attributed to reason for high cases of Anorexia among female than male. In addition, the study will also serve as a wakeup call for all stakeholder in nutrition to put all hands on deck on promoting diet that helps in maintaining good body shape, so that the high level of fear of been overweight especially among young ladies will reduce. This will help them to learn the best method of controlling their weight than exposing themselves to Anorexia.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

Based on the outcome of this study, the researcher hereby concludes that self-concept as a factor yielded a significant outcome in fear of overweight among females with those who have high self- concept as a factor yielded a significant outcome in fear of overweight among females with those who have high self-concept manifesting higher degree of fear of overweight than those with two self-concept. Also marital status yielded a significant influence on fear of overweight with single ladies fear of overweight more than married females.

### **Limitations of the Study**

First and foremost, only females were used out of myriad of females in Enugu. In addition, the research findings cannot be generalized with confidence. This is based on the promise that participants were obtained from people of a homogenous culture. Finally, the researcher experienced some financial difficulties on the course of this study.

### **Suggestions for Further Study**

Future researchers should carry similar study in other localities to cross validate the findings of this study. In addition, similar study should be carried among male to determine variation with the female. Above all, subsequent researchers should learn to use participants from heterogeneous culture. Finally, researcher on the areas of fear of overweight should be encouraged. This will help increase the volume of literature material on the concept.

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