

**Role of Body Image Satisfaction and their Link with Self-Compassion and Psychological Well-being**

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**Abstract**

The current study explored the “Role of Body Image Satisfaction and their link with Self Compassion and Psychological Well-being among University Students”. Cross sectional survey research design was used to collect data from University students. Data was collected from University of Haripur and Islamia University Islamabad by using purposive sampling technique. The sample comprised of 300 students which consists of 150 males and 150 females. Three reliable instruments were used to take the response of participants including: Body Self-Image Questionnaire (BSIQ) is given by Thomas F. Cash (2000), Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) by a team of researchers from the University of Warwick and the University of Edinburgh (2006) and Self-Compassion Scale-Short Form (SCS-SF). SCS-SF (Neff, 2003). Data was analyzed through SPSS. Through correlation results it is concluded that self-compassion has significant positive correlation with body image satisfaction and psychological well-being significantly correlated with each other. Value of t-test indicated that male students exhibited higher score on mental well-being scale compared to the female students and also t-test indicate students having educated parents exhibited higher score on self-compassion scale. One way analysis of variance of social media usage indicated that students who use social media less than 3 hours exhibited higher level of psychological well-being as compared to the students who use 3 to 6 hours and more than 6 hours per day.

**Keywords:** Self-compassion, body-image, psychological well-being, students

**Introduction**

University students often face heightened issues related to body consciousness, self-evaluation, social comparison, negative self-perceptions, and dissatisfaction with their lives, which can disrupt both their daily functioning and academic performance (Zubair, 2008). Consequently, this study aims to explore university students' perceptions of self-compassion, body image, and psychological well-being.

**Body image**

Body image refers to the mental representation we form of our own body (Wiederman, 2000). This image is a combination of both conscious and unconscious perceptions and carries a sociological significance, reflecting how adults see themselves in relation to

their family and society (Wiederman, 2000). Additionally, body image encompasses the boundaries of one's body and the ability to recognize body parts as connected to one's identity (Thompson, 1990).

Body image plays a crucial role in shaping one's overall self-esteem and body-related self-respect (Becirevic & Bulian, 2005). According to Cash (2002), significant changes in body image occur during puberty and continue with physical maturation, making the development of body image a lifelong process (Gokee & Tantleff-Dunn, 2002).

### **Self-Compassion**

Self-compassion is the practice of treating oneself with kindness and understanding when things go wrong, rather than being self-critical (Clarke et al., 2004). It involves offering non-judgmental acceptance of one's negative thoughts, feelings, and experiences, recognizing them as part of the shared human experience (Neff & Pommier, 2012). Research has demonstrated that self-compassion is strongly linked to positive outcomes such as happiness, optimism, positive emotions, and wisdom (McGehee & Neff, 2009), as well as personal initiative, curiosity, and exploration (Adams et al., 2007). It is also associated with personality traits like agreeableness, extraversion, and conscientiousness (Kirkpatrick, Neff, & Rude, 2007). Conversely, self-compassion has been found to reduce academic procrastination and dysfunctional attitudes (Iskender, 2011). Furthermore, studies by Neff (2003) indicate that self-compassion is a strong predictor of mental health, life satisfaction, and social connectedness, while being negatively associated with anxiety, self-criticism, depression, rumination, thought suppression, and neurotic perfectionism (McGehee & Neff, 2009).

### **Psychological Well-Being**

The concept of well-being originated in the field of health and has often been equated with healthfulness. Psychological well-being is a complex, multidimensional idea that centers on an individual's experience of profound happiness, resilience, wisdom, and both physical and social well-being (Seligman, 2002). It differs from eudaimonic well-being, which emphasizes the meaning and purpose of life, focusing on constructs like fulfillment, autonomy, and control (Dolan, Layard, & Metcalfe, 2011; Deaton & Kahneman, 2010).

Based on a meta-analysis, Diener and Fujita (1995) identified three key components that characterize psychological well-being, despite individual differences in causes and expression. First is life satisfaction, which refers to people who are content with their work and personal relationships (Forgas, 2002). Second is the relative presence of positive affect, where individuals who frequently experience positive emotions tend to evaluate the world optimistically and, as a result, have higher psychological well-being (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002). Lastly, psychological well-being is marked by a relative absence of negative affect, meaning that individuals with higher well-being experience fewer and less intense episodes of negative emotions such as anxiety, depression, and anger (Deci & Ryan, 2001).

### **Self-Compassion and Body Image**

Several studies have found a positive relationship between self-compassion and body image (Adams & Leary, 2007; Augustus-Horvath, Tylka, & Wood-Barcalow, 2010; MacKinnon, MacLellan, & Wasylkiw, 2012). For instance, self-compassion has been shown to reduce distress after consuming fatty foods among dieters (Adams & Leary, 2007). Kowalski, Magnus, and McHugh (2010) found that among women who regularly exercise, higher self-compassion was associated with lower social physique anxiety. Additionally, self-compassion fosters a positive body image by promoting

acceptance of one's body and rejecting unrealistic media standards (Augustus-Horvath et al., 2010). It is also linked to less preoccupation with the body, fewer concerns about weight, and greater appreciation for one's body (MacKinnon et al., 2012).

### **Body Image and Psychological Well-Being**

Cash and Fleming (2002) suggested that body image is a crucial factor in women's physical and psychological health. Many college-aged women believe that having a thin and attractive body image leads to happiness and success (Evans, 2003). Research has also linked body dissatisfaction to various forms of psychopathology, including depression and anxiety (Davis & Forman, 2005; Tylka, 2004). Both men's and women's perceptions of their body image have been associated with self-esteem and psychological well-being (Befort et al., 2005). Neff and Pommier (2012) found that body image preoccupation is particularly high among female college students and is positively related to happiness and subjective well-being.

### **Method**

#### **Objectives**

1. To investigate whether there is a positive relationship between self-compassion and both body image and psychological well-being in university students.
2. To examine whether there is a positive association between body image and psychological well-being among university students.
3. To examine if higher social media exposure in university students correlates with reduced body image satisfaction, lower self-compassion, and ultimately, diminished psychological well-being.
4. To determine if there are gender differences in self-compassion, body image, and psychological well-being among university students, with a focus on whether female students tend to score higher than male students in these areas.
5. To assess whether students with higher levels of parental education tend to have more positive body image, higher self-compassion, and better psychological well-being compared to students with lower levels of parental education.

#### **Hypotheses**

H1. Self-compassion is positively related with body image and psychological wellbeing among university students.

H2. Body image is positively associated with psychological wellbeing among university students.

H3. Increased social media exposure among university students is associated with lower body image satisfaction and self-compassion, leading to decreased psychological well-being

H4. Female students are more likely to display more self-compassion, positive body-image, and psychological well-being as compare to male students.

H5. Students with higher parental education would express more positive body image, self-compassion, and psychological wellbeing as compare to less educated parental profile.

#### **Research Design**

This study used a cross-sectional design, as the main tool of quantitative methodology.

#### **Participants**

A cross-sectional study was conducted among university students of Pakistan. Data was collected from the University of Haripur, Islamia University Islamabad.

## Sampling Technique

The participants were selected through purposive sampling technique from different universities.

## Sample Size

The study sample consisted of n=300 university students.

## Instruments

The survey instrument utilized to collect data include design Socio Demographic Questionnaire, is Self-Compassion Scale-Short Form (SCS-SF). SCS-SF (Neff, 2003) consisted of 12 items. Along with Body-Self Image Questionnaire Short Form (BSIQ-SF). Developed by Cash (2002) consisted of 27 items and The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) is a scale of 14 positively worded items for assessing a population's mental well-being.

## Self-Compassion Scale

Self-Compassion Scale-Short Form (SCS-SF). SCS-SF (Neff, 2003) consisted of 12 items Earlier studies reported adequate alpha coefficients of the total SCS-SF; that is  $\alpha = .86$  (Neff, 2003),  $\alpha = .90$  (Neff & McGehee, 2009), and  $\alpha = .93$  (Wasylikiw, 44 MacKinnon, & MacLellan, 2012). In the present study, we found a reliability of  $\alpha = .82$  for the total SCS-SF.

## Body Self-image Questionnaire

The Body Self-Image Questionnaire (BSIQ) is given by Thomas F. Cash (2000) and it is widely used measure of body satisfaction, consisting of 27 items that assess an individual's contentment and acceptance of their physical appearance The BSIQ has excellent internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.92 to 0.95, and good test-retest reliability, with correlations ranging from 0.80 to 0.90.

## Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS)

The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) (2006) is a scale of 14 positively worded items for assessing a population's mental wellbeing final scale consisted of 14 items. All items are scored positively. A Cronbach's alpha score of 0.89 (student sample) and 0.91 (population sample) suggests some item redundancy in scale.

## Procedure

After approval of research topic, I got the authority letters from the Department of Psychology of Government Post Graduate College for Women Haripur, to collect data from the universities to have access to the targeted population. The respective authorities were informed about nature and purpose of the research. The selected students were informed about the nature and purpose of the present study. All the participants who were asked to participate doesn't readily agreed to take part in the research and were trying not to share their information. After the collection of data, it was analyzed by using SPSS 20 and final results were analyzed.

## Results

Table 1: *Psychometric Properties of Study Scales (N=300)*

Variables	N	M	SD	Range	A
BSIQ	300	75.55	15.00	42-109	.80
SCS	300	41.78	10.17	19-66	.83
MWBS	300	37.06	9.96	13-59	.87

Note. N=No of sample, M=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation,  $\alpha$ =Cronbach's Alpha, BSIQ=Body Self-Image Questionnaire, SCS=Self Compassion Scale & MWBS=Mental Well-being Scale

Table 1 is illustrating psychometric properties of study scales. Body Self-Image Questionnaire (BSIQ), Self -Compassion Scale (SCS) and Mental Well-being Scale (MWBS) internal consistencies are ( $\alpha=.80$ ,  $\alpha=.83$  &  $\alpha=.87$ ) respectively. Thus these scales are reliable and valid for measuring the concern subject matter with high alpha reliability. These are the authentic constructs for measuring body image satisfaction, self-compassion and psychological well-being.

Table 2: Pearson Correlation for Study Variables (N=300)

Variables	1	2	3
1.Self-compassion	-		
2.Body Image Satisfaction	.43**	-	
3.Psychological Well-being	.34**	.31**	-

Note. \*\* $\rho < .01$

Table 2 is illustrating the Pearson correlation among study variables. The findings indicate that self-compassion has significant positive correlation with body image satisfaction ( $r = 0.43$ ,  $\rho < .01$ ) and psychological well-being ( $r = 0.34$ ,  $\rho < .01$ ). Body image satisfaction has significant positive correlation with psychological well-being ( $r = 0.31$ ,  $\rho < .01$ ).

Table 3: Mean, Standard Deviation and t-Values of Males and Females on Body Image Satisfaction, Self-compassion, and Mental Well-being Scales (N=300)

Variables	Males (n=150)		Females (n=150)		t(298)	$\rho$	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			
BSIQ	73.25	18.03	63.56	30.81	-1.79	.000	0.38
SCS	39.86	10.54	36.59	16.34	1.34	.000	0.23
MWBS	29.93	16.83	10.82	14.82	-1.52	.005	1.20

Note. n=No of Cases, M=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation,  $\rho$ =Significance Level, BSIQ=Body Self-Image Questionnaire, SCS=Self Compassion Scale & MWBS=Mental Well-being Scale

Table 3 indicates significant mean differences on body image satisfaction with  $t$  (298) = -1.79,  $\rho < .001$ . The findings showed that male students exhibited higher score on body image satisfaction ( $M=73.25$ ,  $SD=18.03$ ) compared to the female students ( $M=63.56$ ,  $SD=30.81$ ). The value of Cohen's  $d$  was  $0.38 < 0.50$  which indicated small effect size. Findings revealed significant mean differences on self-compassion scale with  $t$  (298) = 1.34,  $\rho < .001$ . The results indicated that male students exhibited higher score on self-compassion scale ( $M=39.86$ ,  $SD=10.54$ ) compared to the female students ( $M=36.59$ ,  $SD=16.34$ ). The value of Cohen's  $d$  was  $0.23 < 0.50$  which indicated small effect size. Findings revealed significant mean differences on mental well-being scale with  $t$  (298) = -1.52,  $\rho < .01$ . The results indicated that male students exhibited higher score on mental well-being scale ( $M=29.93$ ,  $SD=16.83$ ) compared to the female students ( $M=10.82$ ,  $SD=14.82$ ). The value of Cohen's  $d$  was  $1.20 > 0.80$  which indicated large effect size.

Table 4: Mean, Standard Deviation and *t*-Values of Parental Education on Body Image Satisfaction, Self-compassion, and Mental Well-being Scales (N=300)

Variables	Educated (n=193)		Uneducated (n=107)		<i>t</i> (298)	$\rho$	Cohen's <i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
BSIQ	72.46	22.85	61.08	28.78	-1.8	.000	0.45
SCS	41.03	11.05	33.16	16.65	1.6	.000	0.59
MWBS	35.90	10.47	31.65	13.28	1.2	.000	0.36

Note. n=No of Cases, M=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation,  $\rho$ =Significance Level, BSIQ=Body Self-Image Questionnaire, SCS=Self Compassion Scale & MWBS=Mental Well-being Scale

Table 4 revealed significant mean differences on body image satisfaction with *t* (298) =-1.8,  $\rho<.001$ . The findings showed that students having educated parents exhibited higher score on body image satisfaction (*M*=72.46, *SD*=22.85) compared to the students having uneducated parents (*M*=61.08, *SD*=28.78). The value of Cohen's *d* was  $0.45<0.50$  which indicated small effect size. Findings revealed significant mean differences on self-compassion scale with *t* (298) =1.6,  $\rho<.001$ . The results indicated that students having educated parents exhibited higher score on self-compassion scale (*M*=41.03, *SD*=11.05) compared to the students having uneducated parents (*M*=33.16, *SD*=16.65). The value of Cohen's *d* was  $0.59<0.80$  which indicated medium effect size. Findings revealed significant mean differences on mental well-being scale with *t* (298) =1.2,  $\rho<.001$ . The results indicated that students having educated parents exhibited higher score on mental well-being scale (*M*=35.90, *SD*=10.47) compared to the students having uneducated parents (*M*=31.65, *SD*=13.28). The value of Cohen's *d* was  $0.36<0.50$  which indicated small effect size.

Table 5: Mean, Standard Deviation and One-way Analysis of Variance of Body Image Satisfaction, Self-compassion, and Mental Well-being Scales across Hours Spent on Social Media (N=300)

Variables	< 3 hours (n=69)		3 to 6 hours (n=98)		> 6 hours (n=133)		<i>F</i> (2,297)	$\eta^2$
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
BSIQ	76.09	20.79	25.69	13.75	19.05	29.79	142.87***	0.98
SCS	38.65	10.92	25.69	13.75	18.86	19.82	33.71***	0.47
MWBS	36.84	9.90	21.95	17.19	17.64	16.91	34.69***	0.48

Note. n=No of Cases, M=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation, \*\*\* $\rho<.001$ ,  $\eta^2$ =Partial Eta Square, BSIQ= Body Self-Image Questionnaire, SCS=Self Compassion Scale & MWBS=Mental Well-being Scale

Table 5 is illustrating the mean, standard deviation and *F*-values for body image satisfaction, self-compassion and psychological wellbeing across hours spent on social media. Results revealed significant mean differences across hours on body image satisfaction with *F* (2,297) =142.87,  $\rho<.001$ . Results showed that students who use social media less than 3 hours exhibited higher level of body image satisfaction as compared to the students who use 3 to 6 hours and more than 6 hours per day. The value of  $\eta^2$  was  $0.98>0.80$  which indicated large effect size. Findings indicated significant mean differences across hours on self-compassion with *F* (2,297) =33.71,  $\rho<.001$ . Results showed that students who use social media less than 3 hours exhibited higher level of self-compassion as compared to the students who use 3 to 6 hours and more than 6 hours per day. The value of  $\eta^2$  was  $0.47<0.50$  which indicated small effect size.

Findings also showed significant mean differences across hours on psychological wellbeing with  $F(2,297) = 34.69, p < .001$ . Results showed that students who use social media less than 3 hours exhibited higher level of psychological well-being as compared to the students who use 3 to 6 hours and more than 6 hours per day. The value of  $\eta^2$  was  $0.48 < 0.50$  which indicated small effect size.

## Discussion

The aim of the current investigation is to evaluate the quantitative survey on “Role of body image satisfaction and their link with self-compassion and psychological well-being among university students”. Moreover, the study aimed to investigate the relationship and demographic differences on study variables. - Body image satisfaction means contentment and acceptance of one's physical appearance. Self-compassion is treating oneself with kindness and understanding. Psychological well-being is a positive state of mental health and life satisfaction. At first, reliability and validity of construct was ensured. For data collection three reliable questionnaires are used namely Body Self-Image Questionnaire (BSIQ) is given by Thomas F. Cash (2000), Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) by a team of researchers from the University of Warwick and the University of Edinburgh (2006) and Self-Compassion Scale-Short Form (SCS-SF). SCS-SF given by (Neff, 2003). Alpha reliability of (BSIQ), (WEMWBS) and (SCS-SF) are  $\alpha = .80, \alpha = .83$  &  $\alpha = .87$  respectively. Sample size was (N=300) and was taken from University of Haripur by purposive sampling technique. Sample included females (N=150) and males (N=150). To achieve objectives of study various hypotheses were formulated on body image satisfaction, self-compassion and psychological well-being across demographic variables of gender, parental education, hours spent on media usage and age. In current research correlation, one way ANOVA and independent t-test were used. Correlation value indicated that self-compassion has significant positive correlation with body image satisfaction are significantly correlated with each other. Correlation value indicates that body image satisfaction has significant positive correlation with psychological well-being. Value of t test in this research indicated that male students exhibited higher score on mental well-being scale compared to the female students and also results indicated that students having educated parents exhibited higher score on self-compassion scale. One way ANOVA findings indicated that students who use social media less than 3 hours exhibited higher level of psychological well-being as compared to the students who use 3 to 6 hours and more than 6 hours per day.

First hypothesis proposed that self-compassion has been significantly positively associated with body image. The results from Table 3 shows that self-compassion and body image satisfaction are significantly positively correlated to each other thus alternative hypothesis is supported in the study. Self-compassionate women reflected accepting favorable attitudes towards their bodies, and rejecting unrealistic media ideals (Augustus-Horvath et al., 2010). Moreover, MacKinnon et al. (2012) asserted that self-compassion is positively allied with less body preoccupation and fewer concerns about weight, and greater value towards one's body. Results also showed that self-compassion is positively linked with psychological well-being. Previous evidences have also found that that life satisfaction and social connectedness had positive relationship with self-compassion (Neff, 2003). Others supported the evidence that self-reported measures of happiness, optimism, positive affect, wisdom, personal initiative, curiosity and exploration had positively related with the self-compassion (Kirkpatrick et al., 2007).

Second hypothesis proposed that indicated positive association between body-image and psychological well-being. The results found support from earlier studies; for

instance, Cash and Fleming (2002) found that body image played an important role in women's health and their well-being. Similarly, positive behaviors related to physical fitness or health is also positively associated with body-image and self-esteem of both men and women (Befort et al., 2005).

Earlier literature also provided evidence by showing that self-compassion significantly predicted mental health (Neff, 2003); well-being (Adamsetal., 2007); and positive emotions among adolescents and young adults (McGehee & Neff, 2009)

Third hypothesis indicated significant gender differences on self-compassion and psychological well-being, however the results from Table 4 shows that significant gender differences have been found on body image with males showed more positive body image as compare to females. The standards for socio-cultural adaptations related to physical appearance and attractiveness are being contributed by the media, that is the reason females and males both are influencing from media. Prior studies have also shown that females show more positive image then males. But in my results male exhibits higher score then females. The reason is due to males in my study were less exposed to traditional media images and more exposed to social media, which may have presented more diverse and inclusive representations of masculinity, leading to higher body image satisfaction and Societal gender roles and expectations may be shifting, allowing males to feel more comfortable and confident in their bodies, leading to higher body image satisfaction.

Fourth hypothesis showed that university students with higher parental education reflected higher self-compassion, better body image, and enhanced psychological well-being. The results from Table 5 drawn support from the earlier empirical investigations; for instance, higher parental education has been positively associated with better emotional stability and lower anxiety (Sudhir & Lalhirimi, 1989); whereas parental education is an index of class status and personality characteristics in the shape of satisfactions and problems associated with it (Anila, Khan, & Pervez, 1991).

Likewise, students with higher parental education are relatively more confident, self-reliant, and free from anxieties, and other psychological problems (Jehangir, Samra, & Tahir, 2000).

Fifth hypothesis indicates that that students who use social media less than 3 hours exhibited higher level of self-compassion as compared to the students who use 3 to 6 hours and more than 6 hours per day. The results from Table 6 also showed that significant mean differences across hours on psychological wellbeing, Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954) states that individuals determine their own self-worth by comparing themselves to others.

The Impact of social media on Self-Esteem (Gilliland & Dunn, 2003) found that limiting social media use to less than 3 hours per day was associated with higher self-esteem and life satisfaction among college students.

### **Implications**

On the basis of present findings, it could be inferred that self-compassion and positive body-image play an imperative role in elevating psychological well-being among university students. Moreover, positive views regarding body-image and psychological well-being would be important for them to feels proud and comfortable with his/her unique body and refuse to spend incoherent amount of time worrying about weight, food and calories. With the positive views they will feel confident and comfortable.

As the finding indicates that negative views regarding self-compassion, body-image and psychological well-being lead to psychological problems such as depression, loneliness, and anxiety, so the important implication is the awareness in young adults through seminars, presentations, workshops, group meetings and pamphlets regarding



positive self-compassion, body-image and psychological well-being. Problem-focused coping strategies would be beneficial for counselor, educators and for practitioners. Moreover, Social skills would be helpful for enhancing self-compassion. The educators and professionals may incorporate mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) program to increase self-compassion which would automatically enhance positive body-image and psychological well-being of the students.

### **Limitations and Suggestions**

There are a few potential limitations are inherited in the present study. For instance, respondents were taken from the universities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi only which restricted the generalizability of the results. Therefore, the universities of other cities would provide wider explanation about constructs of present study. Secondly, findings were interpreted only on the basis of gender and parental education. It would be more appropriate to include other related demographics such as age, parental occupation and student education, thereby enhancing the understanding about the constructs.

Thirdly, in the present study only quantitative measures were used to assess the variable which may limit the response of the participants. However, employing qualitative measures such as interview and focus group discussion would permit the respondents greater liberty in sharing their perception regarding self-compassion, body-image and psychological well-being. Finally, inclusion of cross sectional design would offer in-depth understanding of the study variables.

### **Conclusion**

The current study explored the “Role of Body Image Satisfaction and their link with Self Compassion and Psychological Well-being among University Students”. Cross sectional survey research design was used to collect data from University students. Data was collected from University of Haripur by using purposive sampling technique for measuring relationship between body image satisfaction, self - compassion and psychological well-being. It is concluded that self-compassion significantly correlates between body-image and psychological well-being. Moreover, it was also found that the gender and parental education plays an important role in relation to self-compassion, body-image and psychological well-being among university students and also showed that significant mean differences across hours on psychological wellbeing,

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