



Body Image and Psychological Well-Being : A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

The notion of body image encompasses various dimensions which is influenced by perceptual, attitudinal, cognitive, and behavioural dimensions, and it is a key aspect in psychological well-being. The purpose of the review was to synthesize literature available on the association between psychological well-being and body image, determine the mediating variables, gender, cultural differences, and note limitations and implications on future research. A comprehensive search utilizing esteemed databases such as PubMed and Google Scholar was performed. The search strategy covered articles issued between 2004 and 2025 (September) written in English and met present exclusion and inclusion criteria. In the end, 24 studies were part of the analysis. Most studies reported a significant positive relationship between psychological well-being and positive body image. The mediators were self-esteem, self-compassion, resilience, and family communication. Females reported greater body dissatisfaction than males. Perceptions of body image were further influenced by cultural values and the sociocultural norms. The review concludes that body image is a good predictor of psychological well-being. Overall, the evidence highlights that the improvement of body image can make a great contribution towards improving psychological well-being. Therefore, promoting healthier body attitudes should be made a priority in mental health programmes, educational settings as well as future research.

INTRODUCTION

Body Image

The psychological phenomenon known as "body image" was initially defined by Austrian psychoanalyst and psychiatrist Paul Schilder in his 1935 work, "The Image and Appearance of the Human Body." The concept of body image consists of two components: 'body' and 'image'. The term 'body' pertains to physical characteristics, while 'image' signifies a mental representation. Therefore, by merging these two terms, Schilder characterized body image as an individual's mental representation of their own physical characteristics. Body image may be characterized as negative, referred to as "body negativity" or positive, known as "body positivity."

There are four key aspects of body image: perceptual, attitudinal, cognitive and behavioural (Cash, T. F. 2011). Perceptual dimension of body image is the precision of the judgment concerning the body parts or the entire body. In brief,

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the manner in which one views his body size, shape and weight are termed as the perceptual body image, which is not necessarily the accurate depiction of how the body actually appears to be.

Attitudinal Body Image is defined as what individuals feel about own look. It involves the like or dislike of own body or certain parts of it. It can encompass emotions like pride, shame and anxiety. Cognitive Body Image is the thoughts and beliefs that people have concerning their body. It comprises the level of investment that each individual makes on their appearance. For example: If I lose five pounds, I'll finally be happy.

Behavioural dimension is the behavioral disturbances that arise from a negative perception of one's body appearance. For example, when a person feels unhappy about their overweight condition, they may engage in weight control techniques such as dieting, reducing their food intake, or intentionally vomiting after meals, and so on.

Psychological Well-Being

Psychological well-being (PWB) includes various interpretations that are primarily associated with the notion of well-being. Historically, numerous studies have defined "well-being" as the state of not being unwell, particularly the lack of depression, anxiety or other mental health disorder. PWB consists of components such as self-respect, positive emotions, participation in daily activities, overall satisfaction, the lack of suicidal thought, personal control, minimal stress levels and social support. Psychological well-being represents the overall mental health and functioning of an individual, incorporating their feelings and behaviors. This complex concept involves positive emotions, a sense of purpose, and the presence of healthy relationships.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), psychological well-being refers to being in total physical, mental, and social health and not just being disease-free or weakness.

According to Ryff (1988), psychological well-being is the degree to which people feel they have expressive control over their lives and the activities they undertake. In 1989, psychologist Carol Ryff developed a model of psychological well-being that includes six factors. These factors are environmental mastery, autonomy, positive relationships, personal growth, and a sense of purpose in life.

Autonomy: The ability to make independent choices and decisions. Individuals have the capability for self-reliance, independence, and the management of their own behavior. Self-determination, autonomy, and internal self-regulation enable individuals to evaluate themselves based on personal standards.

Environmental mastery: The effective management of one's environment and daily challenges. This entails having the confidence to navigate one's surroundings and make prudent decisions that contribute to a nurturing and satisfying life.

Personal growth: The ongoing process of development and realization of one's potential. This includes a dedication to continuous personal growth and conviction in one's ability to grow and learn from diverse experiences.

Positive relationships: Developing supportive and enriching relationships with others. This refers to engaging in rewarding and meaningful connections defined by empathy, closeness, and mutual support.

Purpose in life: Possessing purpose and meaning in life. This involves having a well-defined purpose and significance in life, along with objectives and ambitions that promote motivation and fulfillment.

Self-acceptance: Understanding and valuing oneself. This includes maintaining a positive outlook on oneself, acknowledging and accepting both strengths and weaknesses, and nurturing positive feelings about one's past.

Objectives

The review aims to:

1. Integrate the available literature which has defined the correlation between psychological well-being and body image.
2. To identify mediating variables.
3. Identify body image concerns that are specific to gender and culture.
4. Determine and mark the existing trends, outline the limitations related to them, and express the way it will impact the future research projects and intervention plans.

Method

A systematic review of the literature was performed using databases including PubMed, ResearchGate and Google Scholar. The review included articles that were written in English language

published between 2004 to September 2025 and which had studied association between body image and psychological well-being across various age groups and cultural settings. Research that was not available in full text and case studies were excluded from the review. In alignment with the study's objectives and the established inclusion and exclusion criteria, an extensive search was performed across multiple bibliographic repositories. Keywords employed in the search included "body image", "psychological well-being", and "body dissatisfaction". Throughout the inquiry, Boolean operators (such as and, not, or) were employed to collect pertinent studies regarding psychological well-being and body image.

Screening and selection

Review process is carried out following the PRISMA statement and included the following stages.

1. A preliminary inquiry resulted in 150 articles.
2. A count of 28 articles has been excluded because they were found to be duplicates.
3. A selection procedure took place on 122 abstracts and titles.
4. As a result of the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 72 papers were excluded.
5. 50 complete studies were thoroughly evaluated.
6. This resulted in the selection of 24 studies.

Results

Table 1- Body Image& Psychological Well-Being

Body Image & Psychological Well-Being				
SN	Author (Year)	Variables	Scales	Findings
1	Abbasi & Zubair (2015)	Body Image Self-Compassion Psychological Well-Being	MBSRQ-Appearance Scale (Cash, 2002) Self-Compassion Scale – Short Form Affectometer-2 (Naheed, 1997)	The results revealed a positive association between self-compassion, psychological well-being and, body image among students, with self-compassion mediating the correlation between psychological well-being and body image. Differences in body image related to gender were noted, yet not in psychological well-being or self-compassion.
2	Alikhani et al. (2024)	Body Image Psychological Well-Being	Body Image Scale (McKinley and Hyde, 1996) Psychological Well-Being Scale (Ryff, 1989) Post-traumatic Growth Inventory (Tedeschi)	The results showed a substantial correlation between women's post-traumatic growth and psychological well-being.
3	Canonigo et al. (2024)	Psychological Well-Being Body Image Social Media Usage	Body Self-Image Questionnaire Social Networking Usage Questionnaire Psychological Well-Being Questionnaire	The findings revealed that high degrees of information sharing, social engagement, involvement with current news, collaborative learning, assessments of overall appearance, influence of health and fitness, and focus on personal grooming serve as significant positive predictors of students' psychological-well being.

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4	Delfabbro et al. (2011)	Body Image Psychological Well-Being	Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) General Health Questionnaire (Goldberg, 1978) Life Satisfaction Scale (Warr et al., 1979) Family Assessment Device (Epstein et al., 1983) NEO-Personality Inventory (Costa & McCrae, 1992)	The outcomes suggested that girls are more frequently dissatisfied than boys with their weight and looks. affecting their self-esteem more than life-satisfaction. Psychologically well adjusted girls tend to be more extraverted, have strong social and family support.
5	Dotse & Asumeng (2014)	Body Image Satisfaction Psychological Well-Being	Satisfaction with Appearance Scale (Lawrence et al., 1998) Body Shape Questionnaire (Cooper et al., 1987) Psychological Wellbeing Scale (Ryff, 2004) Africentric Values Scale (Grills & Longshore, 1996)	The results showed a strong positive link between psychological well-being and body image satisfaction, moderated by Africentric Values. Males were more satisfied than females, but education level did not significantly affect body image satisfaction.
6	Fahami et al. (2018)	Body Image Psychological Well-Being	Body Image Rating Scale (Garcia et al., 2002) Ryff's Psychological Wellbeing Scale	The results revealed positive and significant correlation between the scores of psychological well-being and body image satisfaction. Regression analysis revealed that the two variables of self-acceptance and personal growth can predict body image in pregnant women.
7	Farsani et al. (2020)	Psychological Well-Being Depression Self-Esteem Body Satisfaction	Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale for Children Psychological Well-Being Scale (Ryff, 1989) Family Communication Scale Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg) Body Satisfaction Scale General Functioning Scale (Epstein et al.)	The results indicated that both family communication and functioning had a direct impact on the psychological well-being of adolescents. Furthermore, family communication and functioning, along with satisfaction with body image, also influenced psychological well-being indirectly by way of depression and self-esteem.

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8	Molina-Garcia et al. (2019)	Body Dissatisfaction Psychological Well-Being	Global Physical Activity Questionnaire (Bull et al., 2009) Subjective Vitality Scale (Ryan and Frederick, 1997) Body Dissatisfaction subscale of the revised Eating Disorders Inventory (Garner, 1998) Perceived Physical Ability subscale of the Physical Self-Efficacy Scale (Ryckman et al., 1982)	The results revealed that leisure-time physical activity serves as a positive predictor of perceived physical ability. Both body mass index and perceived physical ability were found to predict body dissatisfaction, with BMI having a positive correlation and perceived physical ability showing a negative correlation. Furthermore, body dissatisfaction was found to negatively influence subjective vitality, while perceived physical ability was positively associated with subjective vitality.
9	Hicks et al. (2022)	Body Image Dissatisfaction Maladaptive Perfectionism Psychological Well-Being	Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (Crowne and Marlowe, 1960) Psychological Well-Being (Ryff, 1989) Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (Frost et al., 1990) Multidimensional Body-Self Relations Questionnaire-appearance scales (Cash, 2000) Frost	The findings revealed that females exhibited greater satisfaction with their body area and received higher scores in appearance evaluation. Psychological Well-Being served as a complete mediator in the association between negative body image and maladaptive perfectionism.
10	Islami et al. (2022)	Psychological Well-Being Body Image	Psychological Well-Being Scale (Eva and Bisri) Body Image Scale	The findings showed a notable positive effect of body image variables on psychological well-being.
11	Karna & Sivaraman (2023)	Body Image Psychological Well-Being	Body Shape Questionnaire (Cooper et al., 1987) Psychological Well-Being Scale (Sisodia et al., 2012)	The results revealed a significant negative association between psychological well-being and body image. No gender difference was found between body-image and psychological well-being.
12	Karthikeyan & Bhaumik (2021)	Psychological Well-Being Body Image	Psychological Well-Being Scale (Sisodia and Choudhary, 2012) MBSRQ-Appearance Scale	The findings revealed significant association between appearance evaluation and psychological well-being in male emerging adults ages 20 to 24. Conversely, a statistically significant moderate positive correlation was found between psychological well-being and body area satisfaction in male emerging adults ages 20-24.

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13	Khan et al. (2024)	Body Image Psychological Well-Being Self Compassion	Body Self-Image Questionnaire (Thomas F. Cash, 2000) Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (2006) Self-Compassion Scale (Neff, 2003)	Male students had higher mental well-being scores than females. Students with educated parents scored higher in self-compassion. Students who spend less than three hours on social media reported greater levels of psychological well-being than those who use it for three to six hours or more than six hours daily.
14	Khurshid & Haroon (2018)	Body Image Psychological Well-Being Generalized Contentment	The Body Image Questionnaire (Koleck et al., 1987) Scales of Psychological Well-Being (Ryff,1989) Generalized Contentment Scale (Walter Hudson, 1982)	Males reported higher psychological well-being, greater generalized contentment and better body image than females.
15	Koduri & Baishya (2025)	Psychological Well-Being Self-Esteem Body Image Perception	Self-Esteem Scale (Morris Rosenberg,1965) Psychological Well-Being Scale (Ryff,1988) The nine-silhouette scale (Stunkard,2000)	The results revealed that how people view their bodies affects their mental health. Those who see a big difference between their actual and perceived body image often had lower psychological well-being.
16	Lee et al. (2014)	Body Image Social Media Use Psychological Well-Being	Body-Esteem Scale for Adolescents and Adults (Mendelson et al., 2001) Self Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) Ryff's Scales of Psychological Well-Being (1989)	The results revealed that engaging with social media regarding body image issues negatively affects body satisfaction in the Korea and U.S., while seeking status improves it in Korea. Body Satisfaction boosts psychological well-being in both countries.
17	Peternel & Sujoldi (2009)	Body Image Psychological Well-Being Eating Behavior	Body Satisfaction Scale The Satisfaction with life Scale (SWLS) Food Preferences Scale The Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale The Stress Screening Scale	The findings reveals adolescent dieting negatively affects self-esteem, body image satisfaction, and life satisfaction. A notable percentage of girls from low socioeconomic backgrounds engage in dieting, which can harm their development.
18	Rathod & Kumar (2024)	Body Image Psychological Well-Being Social Media	The Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale Psychological WellBeing Scale (Ryff and Keyes, 1995) The body self image scale (Dr. David Rowe)	The findings showed a robust association between social media, psychological well-being and, body image.

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19	Sapra & Bhatt (2021)	Body Image Peer Pressure Psychological Well-Being	Psychological Well-Being Scale (Sisodia et al., 2012) Body Esteem Scale (Stephen Franzoi) Peer Pressure Scale (Kiran Esen, 2002)	The findings showed positive association between psychological well-being and body esteem, while a negative correlation was identified between peer pressure and psychological well-being; furthermore, a negative association was also observed between body esteem and peer pressure. Regarding gender disparities, a significant difference was noted in peer pressure, with males exhibiting greater susceptibility to peer pressure; however, no notable gender differences were found concerning body esteem and psychological well-being.
20	Shankar & Dutt (2024)	Body Image Satisfaction Psychological Well-Being Resilience	Brief Resilience Scale (Smith et al., 2008) Psychological Well Being Scale (Ryff et al., 2007) Body Image Satisfaction Rating Scale (koleck et al., 2002)	The findings indicated that resilience and well-being and body image satisfaction were positively correlated. Resilience and wellbeing had a positive correlation. Significant differences between genders were also found.
21	Silvasarathy Naidu et al. (2025)	Body Image Self-Esteem Psychological Well-Being	Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale International Physical Activity Questionnaire General Well-Being Questionnaire (Dupuy, 1977) Body Shape Questionnaire (BSQ-16B)	The results showed strong links of body image with physical exercise, and self-esteem, but not with psychological well-being.
22	Tager et al. (2004)	Body Image Psychological Well-Being	Psychological Well-Being Scale (Ryff, 1989) Multidimensional Body-Self Relations Questionnaire (Cash & Pruzinsky, 1990) Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory (CMNI; Mahalik et al., 2003)	The results showed strong links between participant's physical self-evaluations and their psychological well-being. Appearance evaluation influenced self-acceptance. Body image relates positively to perceived environmental mastery. Overweight individuals had lower self-acceptance than underweight ones, highlighting body image's role in psychological well-being in young men.
23	Torres et al. (2024)	Psychological Well-Being Positive Body Image	Functionality Appreciation Scale Body Appreciation Scale-2 Body Responsiveness Questionnaire Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale WHO Quality of Life Scale Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale	The findings showed that those with anorexia nervosa had lower positive body image, psychological well-being and struggled more with emotion regulation. Positive body image significantly predicts emotion regulation, psychological well-being, especially body appreciation in anorexia nervosa.

24	Yazdani et al. (2018)	Psychological Well-Being Body Image	Psychological Well-Being Questionnaire (Ryff) Body Image Inventory (Fisher)	The results revealed a notable association between psychological well-being and body image. No significant differences were detected across a various body mass index.
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Discussion

This systematic review presented an extensive overview of twenty-four empirical studies to synthesize the available evidence concerning the link between psychological well-being (PWB) and body image across various genders and cultures. In most of the studies, a consistent positive relationship has found, suggesting that people with more positive body image showed greater levels of psychological well-being. Positive body image therefore promotes mental well-being whereas feelings of dissatisfaction with the body play a role in distress.

Several investigations (Abbasi & Zubair, 2015; Dotse & Asumeng, 2014; Fahami et al., 2018; Islami et al., 2022) have demonstrated that **body satisfaction or positive body image is a** strong predictor of higher psychological well-being. Self-compassion has also been found to be an important mediator between psychological well-being and body image (Abbasi & Zubair, 2015). Individuals with greater self-compassion tend to exhibit a good body image, in turn contribute to greater psychological well-being. The finding is in support of the notion that internal psychological resources may buffer against the negative effects of body dissatisfaction and have a solidifying effect for mental well-being.

Gender differences have also found, with several studies reporting that females generally experienced greater body dissatisfaction than males (Delfabbro et al., 2011; Dotse & Asumeng, 2014; Khurshid & Haroon, 2018). However, psychological well-being did not always vary between genders, suggesting that while women might have more concerns about their body image, their psychological wellbeing is subject to other psychological and social factors. Males have often showed higher psychological well-being and positive body image (Khurshid & Haroon, 2018).

The findings also demonstrated that cultural values influence body image and its impact on well-being. In particular, Africentric values played a moderating role in the connection between body image and well-being. (Dotse & Asumeng, 2014), while family communication has shown to directly and

indirectly predict psychological well-being (Farsani et al., 2020). The study findings suggest that cultural values, family, and social expectations influence the internalization and response to experiences that relate to the body. However, a few research (e.g., Karna & Sivaraman, 2023) found no gender variances thus indicating that cultural or situational factors can influence results.

Another significant pattern is found that is sociocultural influences, particularly social media's impact. Studies by Canonigo et al. (2024), Lee et al. (2014), and Rathod & Kumar (2024) showed that social media engagement especially appearance related content can affect body image in a positive or negative way depending on the nature and duration of social media exposure. Excessive social media use tends to be associated with lower PWB while limited or constructive interaction online is associated with better well-being.

Although most of the studies showed a positive association, some inconsistencies have been observed. Karna and Sivaraman (2023) reported a negative correlation between psychological well-being and psychological well-being unlike Silvasarathy Naidu et al. (2025) who reported no significant relationship between the variables. These discrepancies may be attributed to cultural contexts.

The existing literature presents several limitations. Firstly, the problem of causation arises, as most studies utilize cross-sectional designs. Secondly, a significant portion of the samples consists of adolescents and students, with scant research focusing on older adults.

In spite of all these limitations, the current results have important implications for both practice and the future of research. The strong association between positive body image and enhanced psychological well-being shows the need for interventions to promote the self-compassion, resilience, healthy media use, and body appreciation across the developmental stages. Schools, healthcare providers, and mental health professionals can integrate body image-based programs in order to improve psychological outcomes. In addition, the role of family communication and cultural values suggests that community-based and

family-centered interventions could be effective in improving body appreciation and psychological well-being. Finally, awareness programs that promote diversity in body shapes, reduce stigma, and promote healthy lifestyle behaviors should be developed by policymakers and educators and should recognize body image as an important aspect of psychological health. Future research should further investigate these implications with varying populations, experimental, and longitudinal approaches to enhance intervention strategies and gains in understanding on how body image affects the well-being in various cultural and developmental contexts.

Conclusion

The review concludes that body image is a good predictor of psychological well-being. A positive body image is linked with better self-esteem, greater emotional regulation, and greater satisfaction with life. The findings also point to the role of self-compassion, family communication, cultural values, and social media when it comes to strengthening or weakening this relationship. Overall, the evidence highlights that the improvement of body image can make a great contribution towards improving psychological well-being. Therefore, promoting healthier body attitudes should be made a priority in mental health programmes, educational settings as well as future research.

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