

YOUNG STUDENTS AND THEIR BODY IMAGE

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ABSTRACT. *Introduction.* The media promotes an ideal of body image. Most of the individuals desire to be as close as possible to the normal values of the body mass index. While being placed in the “normal weight” category, young people can have a body image with direct and positive influences on self-esteem. *Objectives.* This paper aims at highlighting the existence of a link between the values of the body mass index and the self body image. *Methods and materials.* In this study we have engaged 171 students from the Babeş-Bolyai University. The students involved responded to a series of questions comprised in a questionnaire of 16 items, regarding one’s own body image. *Results and conclusions.* The values of the body mass index which determine the real body shape of individuals have a strong influence on the accuracy of perception of their body image.

Key words: body image, young students, body mass index, self esteem

Rezumat. Tinerii studenți și imaginea corporală. *Introducere.* Mijloacele media promovează un ideal de apariție corporală. Indivizii, majoritatea lor doresc să fie cât mai aproape de valorile normale ale indicelui de masă corporală. Situându-se în categoria „ponderali”, tinerii pot avea o imagine corporală obiectivă cu influențe, directe și pozitive, asupra stimei de sine. *Obiective.* Prin această lucrare am încercat să evidențiem existența unei legături dintre valorile indicelui de masă corporală și propria imagine corporală. *Metode și materiale.* La studiul de față au participat 171 de studenți din cadrul Univ. Babeş-Bolyai. Cei implicați au răspuns la o serie de întrebări cuprinse într-un chestionar, cu 16 itemi, privind propria imagine corporală. *Rezultate și concluzii.* Valorile indicelui de masă corporală, ce determină forma corporală reală a indivizilor, influențează acuratețea percepției imaginii corporale.

Cuvinte cheie: imaginea corporal, tinerii studenți, indice de masă corporală, stima de sine

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Introduction

The term body image can easily be mistaken for that of body shape, but as it appears these two terms are not interchangeable. Through body image we understand “the image of our own body, which we create in our own mind, more specifically the way in which we perceive our body” (Schilder, 1935, apud Roy and Payette, 2012, p. 506).

As a multidimensional construct, the body image is considered a cognitive representation consisting of a series of images, perceptions, sensations that the individual has of his own physical appearance (Verplanken, Velsvik, 2008; Baylei 2008; Roy and Payette, 2012; Burlew, Shurts, 2013). According to the specialised literature, the body image of an individual has two basic components, namely perceptual and attitudinal. The perceptual component refers to the degree of approximating one’s own body shape, whereas the attitudinal component involves sensations/feelings of the individual relating to his own body (Gardner, Brown, 2012, apud Coelho et al., 2013).

Objectives

Through this paper, we have tried to emphasize the way in which a series of young people are preoccupied with their own body image and the way in which they are perceived by the other individuals around them.

Materials and Methods

In the current study we engaged a number of N=171 students from the Babeş-Bolyai University. Out of the 171 respondents, 86 are girls and the other 85 are boys. Those involved in the study have responded to a series of questions comprised in a questionnaire of 16 items, relating to their own body image. The study took place during the second semester of the academic year 2012-2013.

Results

The age average of the participants is 22.09 ± 7.188 years (chart no.1).

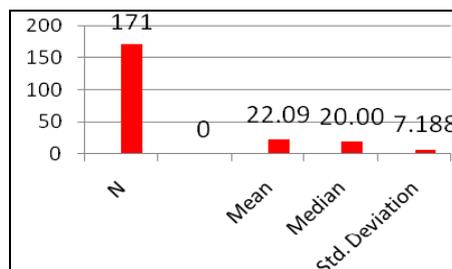


Chart no. 1. Subject’s age

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The gender differences relating to the body mass index have been highlighted in chart no. 2.

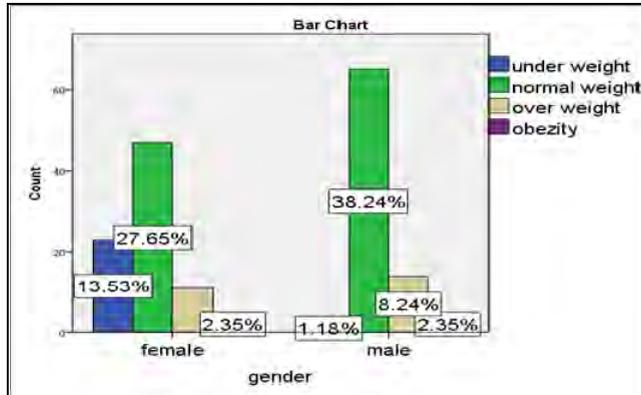


Chart no. 2. Body mass index

The respondents concern towards their own body image is illustrated in chart no. 3.

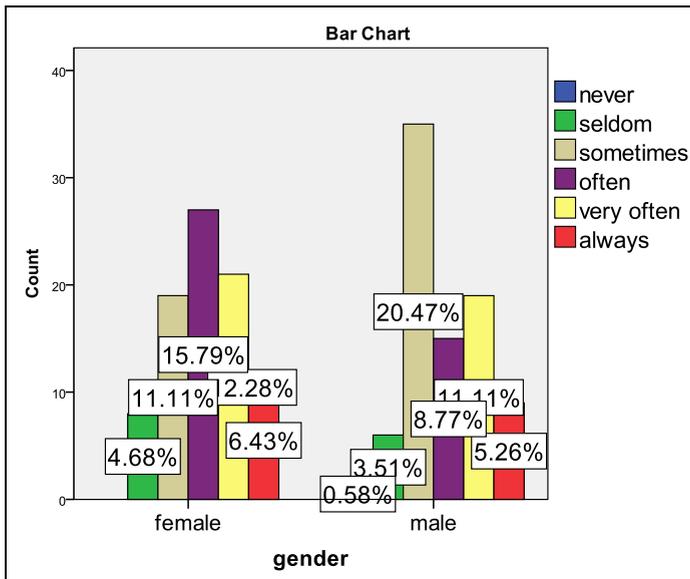


Chart no. 3. Concern towards their own image

The answer to the way in which those surveyed are concerned with certain parts of their bodies is shown in chart no. 4.

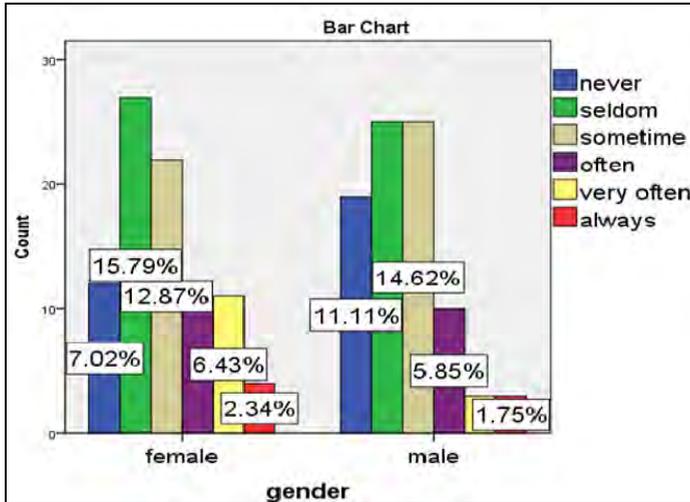


Chart no. 4. Concern with certain parts of the body

Being asked how preoccupied they are in relation to the muscle tone of their own body, the individuals have answered as shown by chart no. 5.

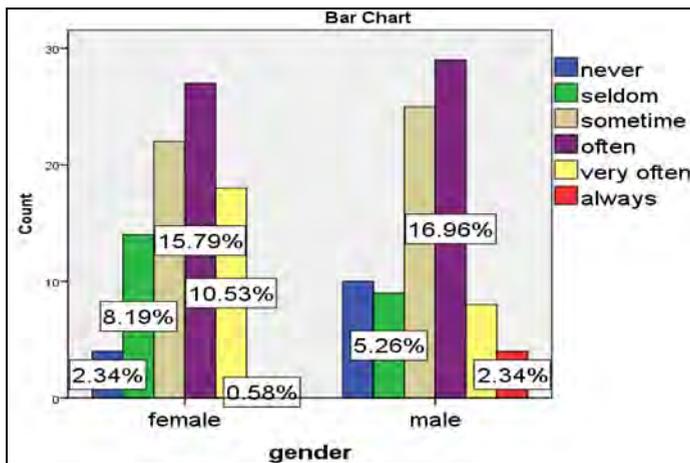


Chart no. 5. Concern with muscle tone

The manner in which the subjects are interested in their body shape, and how much they care whether they are tall or short, thin or overweight, in proportion to the others, has been represented in chart no. 6.

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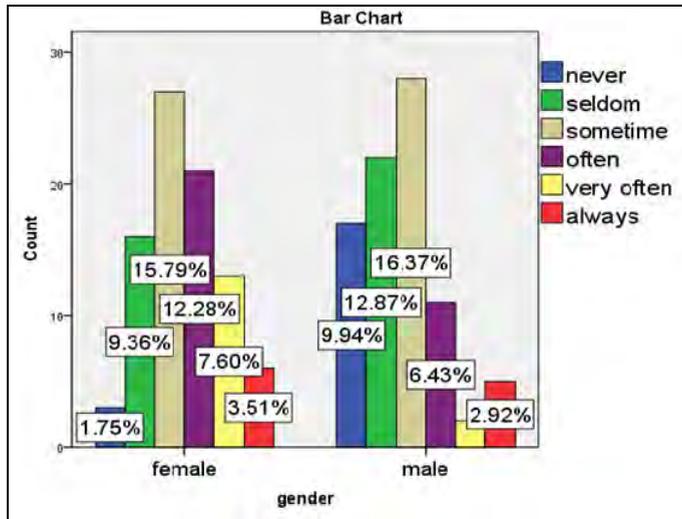


Chart no. 6. Concern towards height, weight and certain body parts

The answers of the participants in the study regarding the tendency to wear certain clothes with the purpose of hiding certain imperfections are shown in chart no. 7.

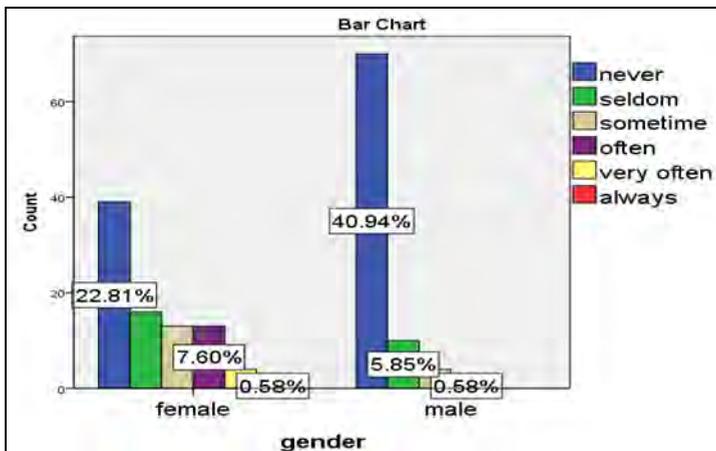


Chart no. 7. Hiding certain imperfections through clothing

The answers to the question relating to the existence of a link between a hyper caloric diet and the perception of the self body image have been shown in chart no. 8.

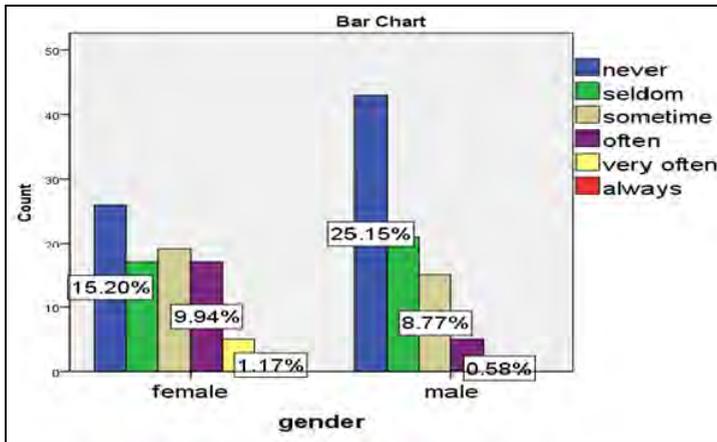


Chart no. 8. Hyper caloric diets and the body image

Asked whether they feel shame or guilt towards their own body, the participants in the study have answered as shown in chart no. 9.

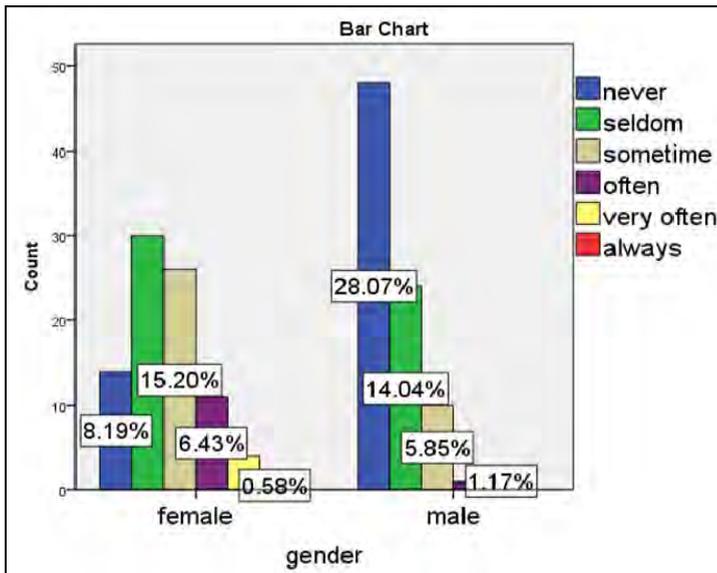


Chart no. 9. Dissatisfaction towards their own body

Questioned whether they have taken on a diet with the aim of improving their body image, the participants have replied as presented in chart no. 10.

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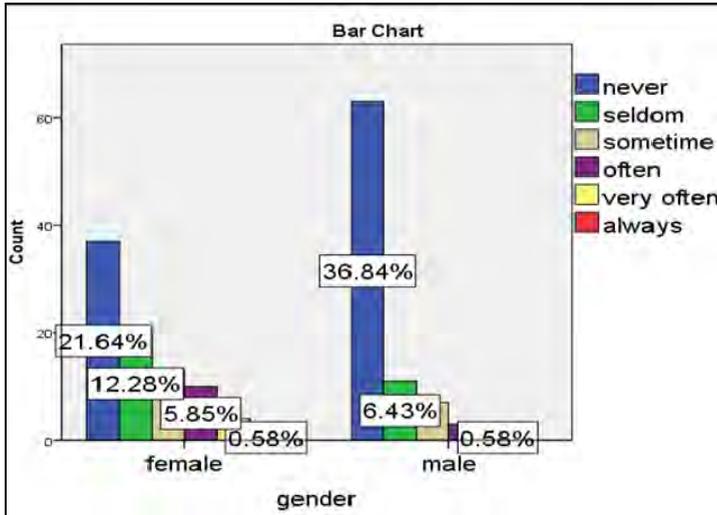


Chart no. 10. Diets and the body image

The answers of the participants regarding their desire to make any changes to their own bodies have been captured in chart no. 11.

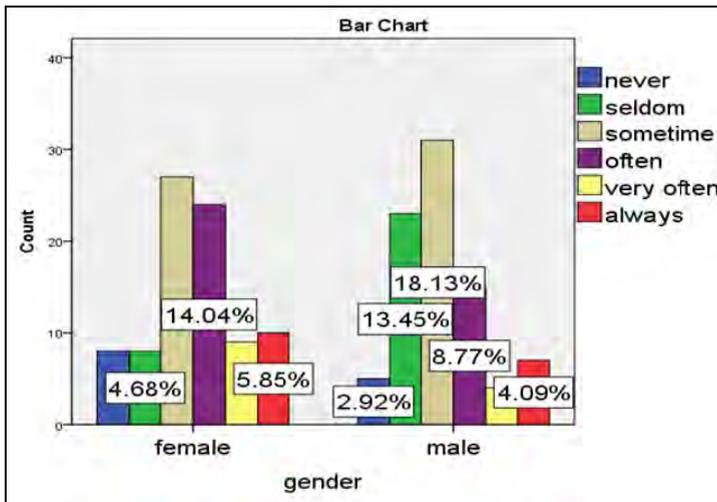


Chart no. 11. The respondents' desire to change something from their own body

Asked whether they are unhappy with the fact that other people around them are better looking, the respondents have answered as shown in chart no. 12.

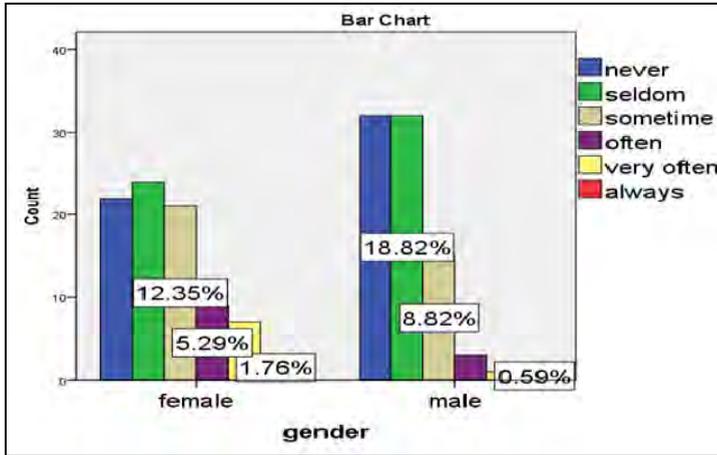


Chart no. 12. The interest towards the appearance of those around

The participants in the study have been asked whether the often compare themselves with those around them and the answered have been gathered in chart no. 13.

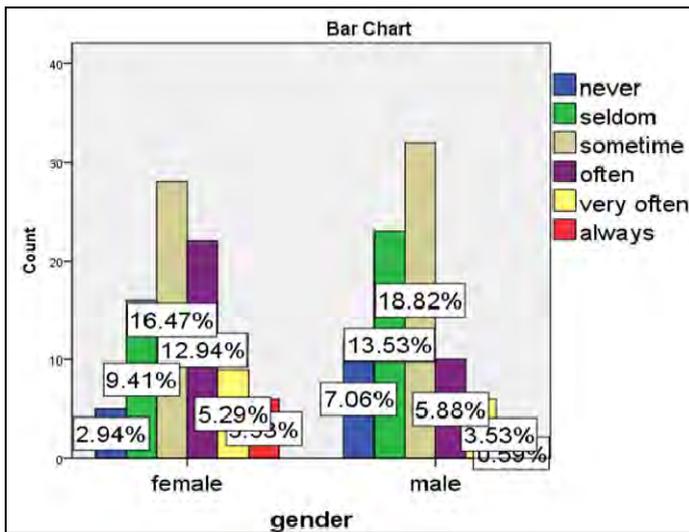


Chart no. 13. Comparing with those around

A large number of respondents are not engaged in physical activities/ sports, this being shown in chart no. 14.

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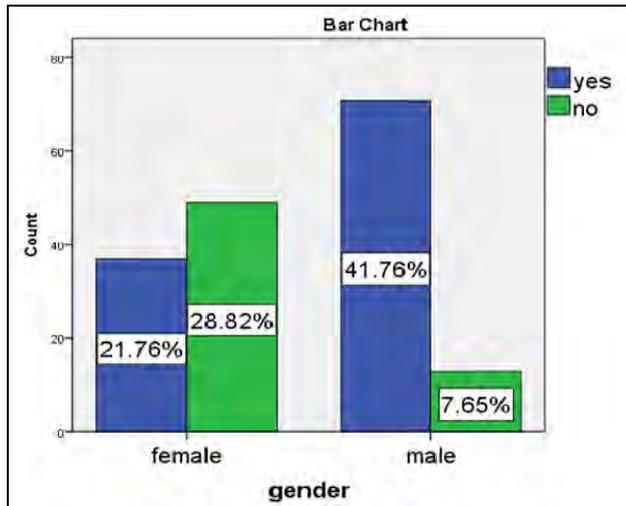


Chart no. 14. Participating in sports activities

Starting from a series of images that represented underweight, normal weight and overweight individuals, the respondents have been asked to identify themselves with one of the images shown. The answers have been represented in chart no. 15.

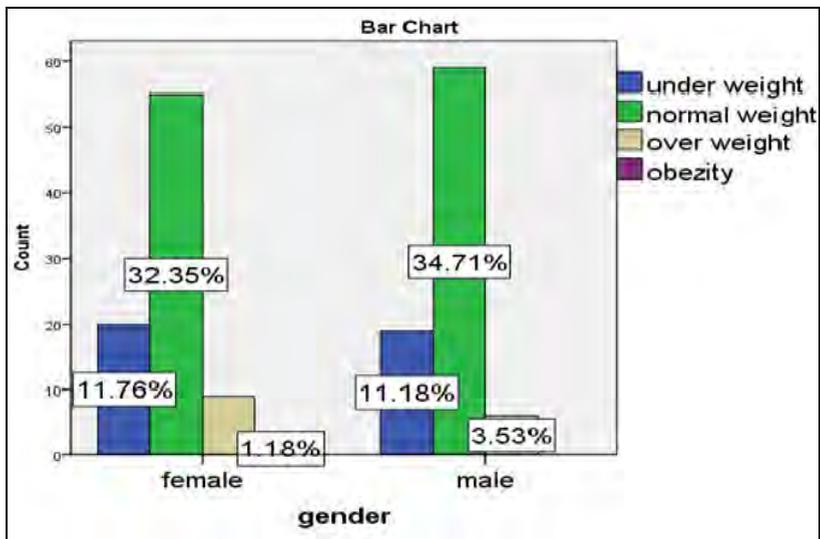


Chart no. 15. Identifying with a series of images

The students have also been asked to identify themselves with a series of images according to how they believed were being perceived by those around them. The images presented underweight, normal weight and overweight or obese people. The answers are presented in chart no. 16.

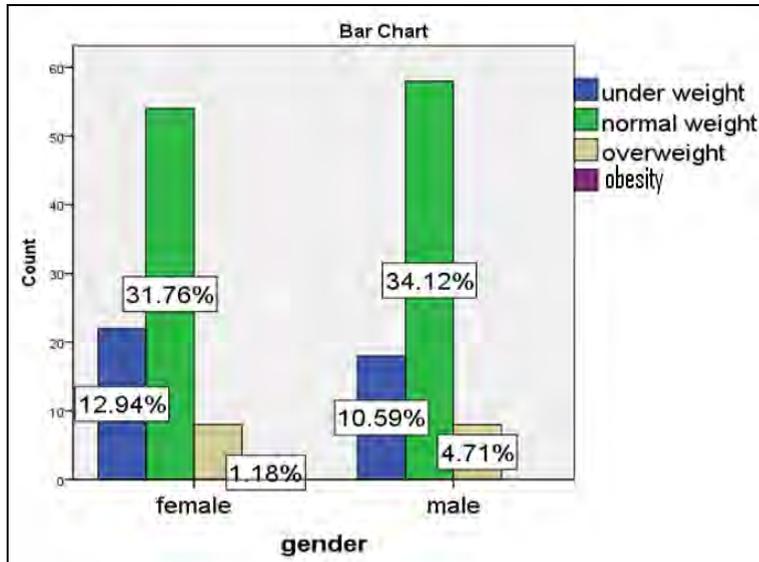


Chart no. 16. The appearance in the eyes of the others

Correlations

	body mass index	Identifying with a series of images under weight, normal weight, overweight, obesity
body mass index	r = 1	.489**
	p = .000	1
Identifying with a series of images under weight, normal weight, overweight, obesity	r = .489**	1
	p = .000	

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Within a threshold of significance of 0.01, Pearson's correlation coefficient has a value of 0.48, meaning that there is a statistically significant correlation. The values of the body mass index which determine the real shape of individuals influences the accuracy of perception of body image.

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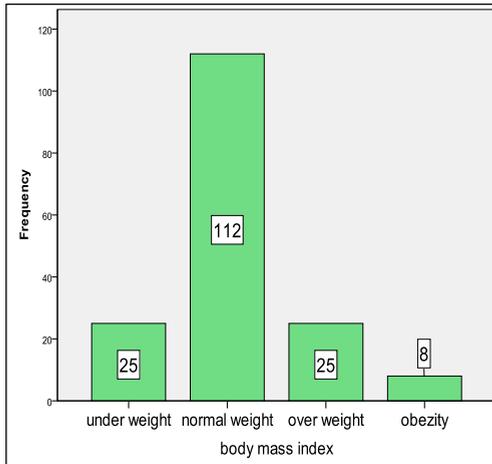


Chart no. 17. Body mass index

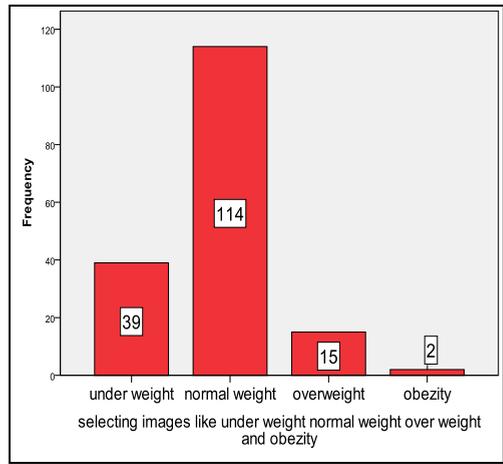


Chart no. 18. Identifying with a series of images

From the above charts, no 17 represents the real values of the body mass index, whereas chart no. 18 stands for the choices made by the subjects relating to a series of images with which they identify themselves. The images we mentioned were in a number of 4, comprising from the point of view of body mass index the four groups of individuals – underweight, normal weight, overweight and obese. From the two charts we can see that individuals generally tend to declare that their body image is superior to the real values of the body mass index. By contrasting the two charts, we can see that the values of the body mass index established the existence of **25 overweight individuals**, whereas **only 15** of those identified themselves correctly with the image corresponding to being overweight. The same situation occurs in the obese category. The values of the body mass index highlight the existence of **8 obese individuals** amongst the participants, whereas **only 2** have identified themselves in the image of the obese person. Differences in value can be seen in the underweight category as well, the body mass index suggesting a total number of **25 underweight individuals** while **39 of the total participants** perceive themselves as members of the above mentioned category.

Discussions

A study based on the body mass index, obesity and the perception of the body image has revealed a series of differences, gender-related. The girls have shown higher values on the body mass index than the boys (Coelho et al., 2013). In our study, several girls appear with values of the body mass index which place them in the category of underweight people.

Nowadays, the ideal of body aspect puts a lot of pressure on young people who mostly participate in fitness activities or other physical activities to attain this ideal. Teenagers can face body mass index disorders, these being registered especially among girls (Grenhill, 2003; Harvey, Robinson, 2003, apud Burlew and Shurts, 2013). People with body mass index disorders undergo a series of behavioural and cognitive changes which often lead to depression, low self-esteem and even suicide (Kimmel și Mahalik, 2004; Raevuori et al., 2008; Wade, George, Atkinson, 2009, apud Burlew and Shurts, 2013).

Regarding the body mass index, our study has shown a remarkable difference. The p-Value in the Chi-Square test was $p = 0.00$. Several girls, namely 13.53% have been catalogued as underweight based on the proportion between height and weight, whereas only 1.18% of the boys have been grouped under the same category (chart no. 2).

Under the item which brings into discussion the concern with the body shape, how tall or short the individuals are, how underweight or overweight they are, upon performing the Chi-Square test, the p-Value was $p = 0.01$, revealing that the gender difference is significant. A percentage of 12.28% of the girls are often preoccupied with the way in which they look, as opposed to only 6.43% of the boys who chose the same answer (chart no. 6).

The Chi-Square test has also pointed out a significant gender-based difference in the item concerning the choice of specific clothing, the p-Value being $p = 0.00$. A percentage of 40.94% of the boys have declared that they have never put on specific clothes to hide certain imperfections of the body, whereas only 22.8% of the girls have declared not ever using this trick (chart no. 7).

A significant difference between boys and girls, with the p-Value $p = 0.006$ was recorded on the item regarding the link between a hyper caloric diet and the concern towards the body image. A percentage of 25.15% of the boys have never been preoccupied with the fact that a hyper caloric diet could influence their body image, whereas only 15.2% of the girls said the same thing (chart no. 8).

For the question regarding the dissatisfaction in relation to their own body, the p-Value $p = 0.00$ shows a significant difference between boys and girls. Only 8.19% of the girls have declared that they never feel ashamed of their body, while 28.07% of the boys have said the same (chart no. 9).

The p-Value $p = 0.03$ as a result of the Chi-Square test indicates a remarkable difference between boys and girls in what concerns the answer to whether they have taken up a diet to maintain or improve their body image. A percentage of 36.84% of the boys have never done this, while 21.64% of the girls have said the same thing (chart no. 10).

A significant difference $p = 0.026$ between boys and girls was revealed in the item regarding the respondents' desire to change something from their own body. A percentage of 13.45% of the boys declared they would very rarely do this, while only 4.68% can say the same (chart no. 11).

The p-Value $p= 0.023$ shows a meaningful difference between boys and girls regarding how often they compare themselves from a body image point of view with those around them. A percentage of 12.94% of the girls stated that they often compare themselves with those around them, whereas only 5.88% of the boys said the same (chart no. 13).

Another important difference between boys and girls appears in relation to the participation in various physical activities, the p-Value being $p= 0.00$. A percentage of 41.76% of the boys claimed that they take part in physical/sports activities, while only 21.76% of the girls can say the same (chart no. 14).

The item which asked the respondents to identify themselves with a series of images, starting from underweight, normal weight, overweight and obese did not register a significant difference, the p-Value being $p= 0.43$. A percentage of 32.35% of the girls have identified themselves with the correct image of the normal weight group. The same happened with a percentage of 34.71% of the boys (chart no. 15).

When asked about the way in which they believe to be perceived by the others, starting from the same images mentioned above, the individuals did not show a significant difference in answers, the p-Value being $p= 0.47$. The large majority, 34.12% of the boys and 31.76% of the girls have declared that they are seen by those around them as being part of the normal weight group (chart no. 16).

Conclusions

The body mass index influences to a large extent the accuracy of the body image of individuals, although some have the tendency to perceive themselves as being part of a superior category as opposed to that indicated by the values of the body mass index. The individuals that are overweight tend to see themselves as being of normal weight. Girls in general identify themselves with the image of underweight, even though their body mass index would classify them as normal weight individuals.

A high percentage of girls, 13.53% are catalogued as being underweight, probably due to the diets they follow to make sure they do not overcome the weight corresponding to their age and height.

The girls who participated in the study are far more preoccupied with the way the look than the boys, as they are also paying attention to what they can wear to hide certain imperfections. From the analysis of data, we gather that girls are more ashamed of their own bodies than the boys.

In what concerns taking up a diet to appear fit in front on the others, results have shown that the girls have adopted such a diet with a higher frequency.

The girls declared they would change more often something about their own bodies, while the boys are less preoccupied with this aspect.

The boys do not compare themselves at a body image level as often as girls do with those around them.

Taking part in sports activities is far more restricted among the girls than among the boys. There are no significant differences from those declared by the respondents between the way in which they perceive themselves and in the way in which they are seen by those around them.

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