



Original Research Article

PREVALENCE OF BODY DYSMORPHIA AND ITS DETERMINANTS AMONG INDIVIDUALS AGED 18–25 YEARS AT A TERTIARY CARE CENTRE: A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Background: Excessive obsession with perceived flaws in physical appearance is the hallmark of Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD), an underdiagnosed mental illness. Although hospital-based statistics in India are still scarce, young adults' increased exposure to social comparison, academic stress, and digital media may be contributing factors to its growing impact. The objective is to determine the sociodemographic, psychological, and behavioral factors that influence body dysmorphia in people between the ages of 18 and 25 who are enrolled in a tertiary care facility.

Materials and Methods: Over the course of three months, a hospital-based cross-sectional study was conducted among people ages 18 to 25. A standardized interviewer-administered questionnaire comprising the Body Dysmorphic Disorder Questionnaire (BDDQ), digital media exposure, psychiatric history, and sociodemographic factors will be used to gather data. Prevalence will be summed up using descriptive statistics. The chi-square test will be used to evaluate associations, and multivariate logistic regression will be used to find independent predictors. The threshold for statistical significance will be $p < 0.05$.

Results: The study is anticipated to show a quantifiable prevalence of body dysmorphia and identify contributing factors like excessive use of social media, low self-esteem, peer pressure, and a history of mental illness.

Conclusion: In conclusion, prompt mental health interventions and screening techniques for young adults can be facilitated by early detection of BDD in tertiary care settings.

Keywords: Body Dysmorphia, mental illness, digital media exposure, low self-esteem.

INTRODUCTION

A persistent and intrusive obsession with perceived flaws in one's physical appearance that are invisible or seem insignificant to others is a hallmark of body dysmorphic disorder, a mental illness. It falls under the category of obsessive-compulsive and related disorders and is linked to severe distress, decreased functioning, and a higher risk of suicide.

Studies conducted on students and young adults demonstrate higher rates ranging from 4% to 13%,

while the global incidence in the general population is considered to be between 2 and 3%. According to Indian literature, the frequency ranges from 3% to 10%; nevertheless, underdiagnosis is frequent because of stigma, ignorance, and insufficient screening in standard clinical treatment.

Multiple determinants contribute to BDD, including:-
Environmental Psychological factors: - anxiety, depression, perfectionism, and low self-esteem influences: peer comparison, bullying, and sociocultural beauty standards

Digital media exposure: image-focused social media platforms and photo-editing filters
 Family and interpersonal dynamics: criticism related to appearance
 Comorbid psychiatric illness: obsessive-compulsive disorder and social anxiety disorder
 BDD is linked to substance abuse, suicidal thoughts and actions, and significant impairment in academic, professional, and interpersonal domains.
 Evidence from Indian tertiary care facilities that especially target late adolescents and young adults is scarce. Planning early screening and intervention methods in this high-risk category requires estimating prevalence and determining factors.

Objectives

Primary Objective

To estimate the prevalence of body dysmorphia among individuals aged 18–25 years attending a tertiary care centre.

Secondary Objective

To assess socio-demographic, psychological, and behavioral determinants associated with body dysmorphia.

To evaluate the association between social media usage patterns and body dysmorphia.

To identify independent predictors of BDD using multivariate analysis.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Design: Hospital based cross sectional study.

Study Setting: Tertiary care hospital Chennai India.

Study Period: December 2025 to March 2026.

Study Population: Individuals aged 18–25 years attending outpatient departments during the study period.

Inclusion Criteria

Age between 18 and 25 years

Ability to understand the questionnaire language

Provision of informed consent

Exclusion Criteria

Severe acute illness

Cognitive impairment preventing participation

Sample size: 145 participants

Data Collection Tool: A structured interviewer-administered questionnaire comprising:

Socio-demographic characteristics

Digital media exposure and usage pattern

Psychiatric history and psychosocial factors

Screening using the Body Dysmorphic Disorder Questionnaire (BDDQ).

Data collection procedure: Following Institutional Ethics Committee approval, eligible participants who visit outpatient departments will be contacted one at a time. Before any data is collected, written informed consent will be acquired. Anonymity and confidentiality was upheld.

Statistical Analysis

Data will be entered in Microsoft Excel and analyzed using statistical software. Descriptive statistics: frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, Inferential statistics: chi-square test for associations
 Level of significance: $p < 0.05$.

RESULTS

Among 148 participants included in the study, 16 (10.8%) exhibited body dysmorphic features, while 29 (19.6%) required further assessment. The majority of participants (69.6%) did not demonstrate significant body dysmorphic symptoms.

A significant positive correlation was observed between social media influence and BDD scores ($r = 0.306$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that participants who perceived greater influence of social media on their appearance reported higher levels of body dysmorphic concerns.

Screen time was also significantly associated with BDD scores ($r = 0.309$, $p < 0.001$). Participants with increased screen exposure demonstrated higher levels of body image dissatisfaction.

Comparison of BDD scores between genders revealed no statistically significant difference ($p = 0.529$), suggesting that body dysmorphic concerns were distributed similarly across male and female participants.

Table 1: Prevalence of Body Dysmorphic Disorder (Primary Objective)

Category	Frequency	Percentage
No Bdd Features	103	69.6%
Needs Further Assessment	29	19.6%
Definite Bdd Features	16	10.8%

Interpretation: Approximately 10.8% of participants demonstrated significant body dysmorphic features, while an additional 19.6% were at risk and required further assessment. Since the study contains questionnaire-based responses and scores, Spearman's correlation is more appropriate than Pearson's correlation for analyzing the relationship between BDD, social media influence, and screen time.

Social Media Influence and BDD

Spearman correlation coefficient (r) = 0.306
 p -value = 0.00016

Interpretation: A statistically significant positive association was observed between perceived social media influence and BDD scores. Participants reporting greater influence of social media on their appearance perception tended to have higher BDD scores.

Screen Time and BDD

Spearman correlation coefficient (r) = 0.309
 p -value = 0.00013

Interpretation: Higher screen time was significantly associated with increased BDD scores. Participants

spending more time on screens exhibited greater body image concerns.

Gender and BDD

Male mean BDD score = 22.55

Female mean BDD score = 21.16

p-value = 0.529

Interpretation: Although males showed slightly higher mean BDD scores, the difference was not statistically significant.

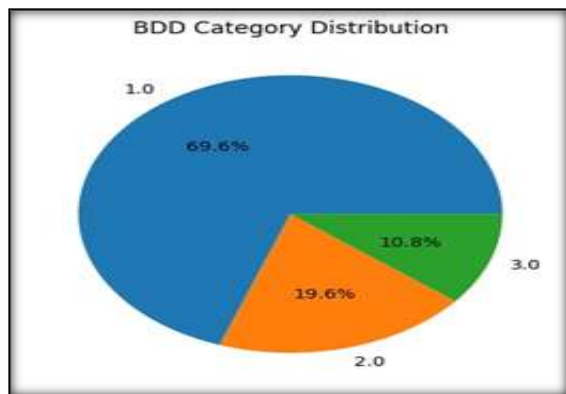


Figure 1

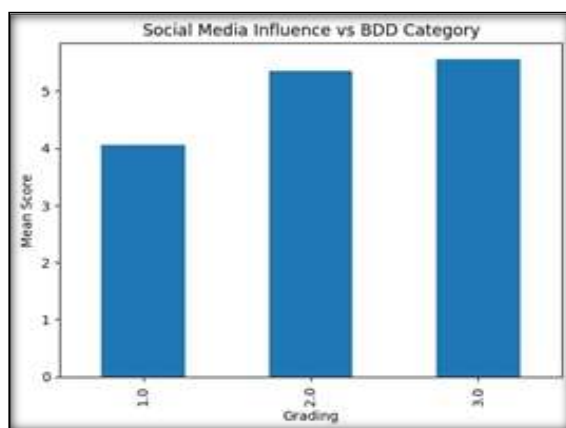


Figure 2

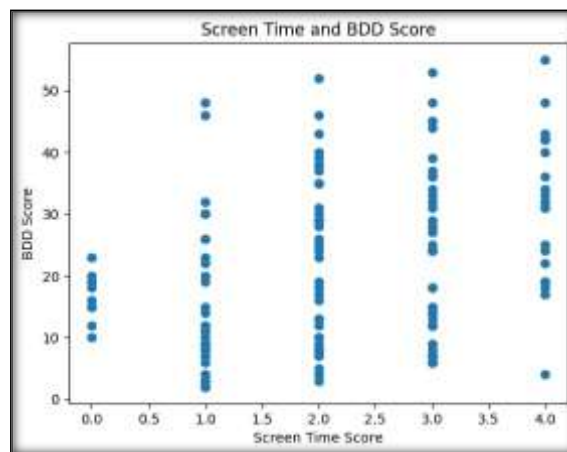


Figure 3

DISCUSSION

The present study found that 10.8% of participants screened positive for BDD, while an additional 19.6% required further assessment. The majority of participants (69.6%) did not demonstrate significant body dysmorphic symptoms.

The prevalence observed in the present study is comparable with findings reported in previous literature. A community-based study by Katharine A. Phillips and colleagues reported prevalence rates ranging from 1.7% to 13% in different populations. Similarly, Bohne et al. observed a prevalence of approximately 13.1% among young adults. Studies conducted among medical students and college populations have reported prevalence rates ranging between 5% and 15%.

The relatively higher prevalence observed in the present study may be attributed to networking platforms, and the widespread use of image-enhancing applications among young adults.

Comparison with Previous Studies

Study	Population	Prevalence (%)
Taqi et al., 2008	Medical students	5.8
Bohne et al., 2002	Young adults	13.1
Phillips et al., 2006	Community sample	9.0
Present study	Young adults (18-25 years)	10.8

The prevalence identified in the current study falls within the range reported by previous researchers, indicating that BDD is an important mental health issue among young adults.

One of the major findings of the present study was the significant positive association between perceived social media influence and BDD scores (Spearman's $\rho = 0.306, p < 0.001$).

Participants who reported greater influence of social media on their perception of physical appearance demonstrated significantly higher body dysmorphic symptoms. This finding supports the hypothesis that frequent exposure to idealized and digitally modified images may contribute to dissatisfaction with one's appearance.

The results are consistent with studies by Fardouly et al., who reported that increased social media engagement was associated with greater body dissatisfaction and appearance-related concerns. Likewise, research by Holland and Tiggemann demonstrated that social networking sites can negatively influence body image through constant comparison with peers and celebrities.

Young adults often engage in appearance-based comparisons on social media platforms. Such comparisons may reinforce unrealistic beauty standards and contribute to the development or exacerbation of body dysmorphic symptoms. The present findings therefore support the growing evidence that social media exposure is an important

psychosocial factor associated with body image disturbances. The present study demonstrated a statistically significant positive correlation between screen time and BDD scores (Spearman's $\rho = 0.309$, $p < 0.001$).

Participants with longer daily screen exposure exhibited higher levels of body dysmorphic concerns. This association may be explained by increased exposure to appearance-focused content, social comparison, and repeated self-evaluation through photographs and videos.

Previous studies have similarly reported that excessive screen time is associated with poor body image and reduced self-esteem. Researchers have suggested that prolonged engagement with digital media increases opportunities for appearance comparison and reinforces unrealistic expectations regarding physical attractiveness.

The findings of the present study are therefore in agreement with contemporary literature indicating that excessive digital engagement may contribute to body image disturbances among young adults. Although male participants demonstrated slightly higher mean BDD scores compared to females, the difference was not statistically significant ($p = 0.529$).

Historically, BDD has often been perceived as more common among females because of societal pressures related to appearance. However, recent studies suggest that BDD affects both genders and may be under-recognized in males.

The absence of a significant gender difference in the present study is consistent with findings reported by several contemporary investigations, which indicate that body image concerns are increasingly prevalent among both male and female young adults. These findings highlight the importance of screening for BDD irrespective of gender. The findings of the present study have important clinical and public health implications.

The prevalence of BDD identified among young adults indicates that body image concerns are common and may often remain unrecognized. Since BDD is associated with anxiety, depression, impaired social functioning, and reduced quality of life, early identification is essential.

The significant association between social media influence, screen time, and BDD suggests that interventions aimed at improving digital literacy and promoting healthy social media use may help reduce body image concerns among young adults.

Educational programs focusing on realistic body image expectations, responsible social media use, and mental health awareness may be beneficial in preventing the progression of body dysmorphic symptoms.

Healthcare professionals should also consider routine screening for body image disturbances in young adults presenting with psychological distress or appearance-related concerns.

Strengths of the Study

The study addresses an emerging and under-researched mental health issue among young adults. A relatively adequate sample size was included. Standardized screening criteria were used for assessment of BDD.

Multiple factors including social media influence and screen time were evaluated simultaneously.

The study provides local data from a tertiary care setting in Chennai, contributing to the limited Indian literature on BDD.

Limitations of the Study

The cross-sectional design prevents establishment of causal relationships.

Self-reported responses may be subject to recall and reporting bias.

Participants were recruited from a single tertiary care center, limiting generalizability.

The study assessed screening positivity rather than clinical diagnosis by a psychiatrist.

Other potential factors influencing BDD, such as depression, anxiety, peer pressure, and family influences, were not evaluated in detail.

CONCLUSION

The present study demonstrated that 10.8% of young adults screened positive for Body Dysmorphic Disorder, while an additional 19.6% required further evaluation. Social media influence and screen time showed significant positive associations with BDD scores, whereas gender was not significantly associated with BDD.

These findings suggest that body image concerns represent a significant mental health issue among young adults and emphasize the need for early identification, awareness programs, and interventions addressing healthy digital media use. The study contributes to the growing body of evidence linking modern digital lifestyles with body image disturbances and highlights the importance of integrating mental health promotion strategies into young adult healthcare services.

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