

# Psychology of Woman Journal

2020, Volume 1, Issue 4, Pp. 40-53 eISSN: 2783-333X

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## The relationship between body image and sexual performance and mental health in married housewives

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### Abstract

This research investigated body image and its relationship with sexual performance and mental health in married housewives. The current research was descriptive and correlational. The research's statistical population was comprised of all married women who were housewives in Mashhad in 2019-2020. Among the statistical population, 450 people were selected and studied as available sampling. Goldenberg's mental health questionnaires (GHQ-28), Rosen et al.'s (1990), and body image of women (1990) were used to collect data. After collecting and extracting the data, the participants' scores were analyzed using Pearson correlation analysis and multiple and multivariable linear regression, and SPSS-24 statistical software. The Pearson correlation analysis results showed a positive and significant relationship between body image and sexual performance in married housewives ( $r=0.363$ ). The component of satisfaction with different parts of the body showed the highest relationship and correlation with the total score of sexual performance in a positive and significant way ( $r=0.321$ ). After that, the components of tendency about weight and the body showed a positive and significant relationship with the total score of sexual performance ( $r=0.301$  and  $r=0.289$ ). There is an inverse and significant relationship between body image and mental health in married housewives ( $r=0.281$ ). The component of satisfaction with different parts of the body showed the highest inverse and significant relationship with the total (absence) score of mental health ( $r=0.225$ ). After that, the components of the body itself (proportion) and attitude about weight showed an inverse and significant relationship with the total score (absence) of mental health ( $r=-0.196$  and  $r=-0.171$ ). Also, regression analysis showed that body image could predict sexual performance and mental health in married housewives.

**Keywords:** *body image, sexual performance, mental health, housewives.*

### Cite this article as:

Zarif, P., & Ghasemian, A. (2020). The relationship between body image and sexual performance and mental health in married housewives. *PWJ*, 1(4): 40-53.



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## Introduction

Body image or physical self-concept is obtained through social communication and a person's direct experience of his physical condition and body. Especially in social relations, what is ideal is seen in the form of visible and invisible behaviors. Then it becomes a criterion for comparing a person's actual situation with theirs. After such comparisons, a person feels satisfied or dissatisfied with his body (Cash, 2006; quoted by (Mira Ahmadi, 2015).

Considering the importance and role of physical feelings during sexual activity, body image has been widely studied among men and women regarding its relationship with sexual health outcomes. During the last decade, much research has been done on the relationship between body image and sexual well-being. These two constructs include emotions, thoughts, and behaviors related to the body, and there is likely a relationship between them (Gillen & Markey, 2018). For example, a person who does not consider his body image pleasant struggles with the feeling of shame to face his sexual partner. On the other hand, a person who has a favorable body image can focus on the pleasure resulting from sexual experience.

Sexual performance includes desire, sexual arousal, peak sexual pleasure, satisfaction, and pain (Rosen et al., 2000). Satisfactory relationships and sexual performance are considered effective factors in family survival and health. In terms of importance, sexual performance is among the first-rate issues of married life, and compatibility in sexual relationships is one of the most important factors affecting happiness and good quality of life (Alif, Asil, Karak, 2019). Sexual relationships can, directly and indirectly, affect the relationships between them in a wide range of ways by influencing

the thoughts and feelings of couples (Litzinger & Gordon, 2015). For many women, sexual disorders are physically disruptive, psychologically disturbing, and socially isolating. Positive and desirable body image is related to favorable mental health in women (Omer, Bosanjak, and Mata, 2020). Many studies have indicated that mental health is also effective in maintaining a desirable sexual relationship. Therefore, according to the colorful role of body image and the importance of women in achieving mental health and sexual performance in order to preserve family unity, it seems that there is a relationship between body image and sexual performance, and on the other hand, between sexual performance and mental health. . Therefore, according to the stated contents, the present study seeks to answer the question whether body image has a significant relationship with sexual performance and mental health in married women who are housewives.

## Method

The current research is applied, and its method is descriptive of the correlation type. The current study's statistical population was comprised of all married women who were housewives in Mashhad in 2019-2020, whose number has not been determined precisely in advance. In this research, an available sampling method was used. For this purpose, 450 married housewives of Mashhad city were selected. They answered Goldenberg's mental health questionnaire (GHQ-28), Rosen et al.'s female sexual function (FSFI), and Bron et al.'s body image questionnaire (MBSRQ). The criteria for the study were: 1- not suffering from acute mental illnesses 2- having at least 18 years of age 3- informed consent to participate in the research, and the criteria for leaving the

research were taking medication and being confused or incompletely completing the questionnaire.

## Materials

**1. Goldenberg Mental Health Questionnaire.** The 28-item Goldberg Mental Health Questionnaire is a screening questionnaire based on self-reporting. In the public health questionnaire, attention is paid to two categories of phenomena: the inability of a person to enjoy a healthy activity and the emergence of new phenomena with a disabling nature. Its main form has 60 statements, and its short form has 12 to 18 statements. Out of the 28 statements of the questionnaire, items 1 to 7 are related to the scale of physical symptoms. Items 8 to 14 examine the symptoms of anxiety and sleep disorder, items 15 to 21 are related to the evaluation of symptoms of social functioning, and finally, items 22 to 28 measure the symptoms of depression.

**2. Women's Sexual Performance Questionnaire: Rosen et al.'s (1999).** Women's Sexual Performance Questionnaire (1999) have 19 questions that measure women's sexual performance in 6 independent areas of desire, psychological stimulation, moisture, orgasm, satisfaction, and sexual pain. The scores of each domain were obtained by summing the scores of the questions of each domain and multiplying them by the factor number.

**3. Body image questionnaire.** This questionnaire was developed by Bron, Cash, and Miolka (1990) with 69 items, which are designed to evaluate the individual's attitude about the different dimensions of the body image structure. This questionnaire includes three scales: The materials of this questionnaire are scored based on a 5-point Likert scale. A higher score indicates more satisfaction. This questionnaire can be used

in people over 15 years of age and is unsuitable for evaluating children. Bron, Cash, and Miolka (1990) examined and confirmed the validity of the questionnaire's main parts. Also, its reliability was reported as 0.81.

## Findings

The highest correlation between body image and sexual performance is observed as positive and significant at  $\alpha > 0.001$  level ( $r = 0.363$ ). After that, body image shows an inverse and significant relationship with lack of mental health at  $\alpha > 0.001$  level ( $r = -0.281$ ), which shows that body image has a positive and significant relationship with mental health.

The total score of body image has the highest relationship with the total score of sexual function in a positive and significant way at the level of  $\alpha > 0.001$  ( $r = 0.363$ ). Also, among the components of sexual performance, the total score of body image shows the most positive and significant relationship with sexual satisfaction at the level of  $\alpha > 0.001$  ( $r = 0.333$ ). After that, the total body image score shows a positive and significant relationship with the components of orgasm and desire at the level of  $\alpha > 0.001$  ( $r = 0.293$  and  $r = 0.285$ ). Also, no significant relationship was observed between the total score of body image and the components of psychological stimulation, humidity and sexual pain. Also, regarding the relationship between the components of body image and the total score of sexual performance, the component of satisfaction with different body parts shows the highest relationship and correlation with the total score of sexual performance in a positive and significant way at the  $\alpha$  level  $< 0.001$  ( $r = 0.321$ ). After that, the components of tendency about weight and the body itself show a positive and significant relationship with the total

score of sexual function at the level of  $\alpha > 0.001$  ( $r = 0.301$  and  $r = 0.289$ ). Among the components of both variables, the most positive and significant relationship is observed between satisfaction from different parts of the body with sexual satisfaction at the level of  $\alpha > 0.001$  ( $r = 0.314$ ). Therefore, the sub-hypothesis of the research is confirmed.

The regression of body image and its components with sexual performance of married housewives is significant and can explain part of its variance ( $F = 42.799$ ,  $\alpha = 0.001$ ). This result shows that the regression coefficients are significant and there is enough evidence to confirm the hypothesis. Also, considering that  $R^2$  is the percentage of common variance of body image components in predicting sexual performance, these components predict 22.4% of the variance of sexual performance.

The value of beta in the presented model indicates the amount of variance explanation of the predictor variable on the criterion. According to the standard beta coefficients, the biggest role and explanation on the sexual performance score is the total body image score, so that with each unit change in its variance, there is a change of 0.345 in the variance of the sexual performance score. After that, the component of satisfaction with different parts of the body by 0.294, attitude about weight by 0.211 and the body itself (proportion) by 0.196 contribute and play a role in predicting the sexual performance of married women.

The total score of body image has the highest relationship with the total score (absence) of mental health in an inverse and significant way at the level of  $\alpha > 0.001$  ( $r = -0.281$ ). Also, among the components of mental health, the total score of body image shows the highest inverse and significant

relationship with the component of physical symptoms at  $\alpha$  level  $< 0.001$  ( $r = -0.211$ ). After that, the total body image score shows an inverse and significant relationship with the components of depression symptoms and anxiety symptoms, respectively, at the level of  $\alpha > 0.001$  ( $r = -0.197$  and  $r = -0.172$ ).

The total score of body image does not show a significant relationship with the component of impairment in social functioning. Also, regarding the relationship between body image components and the total (lack of) mental health score, the component of satisfaction with different parts of the body shows the highest inverse and significant relationship with the total (lack of) mental health score at  $\alpha$  level  $< 0.001$  ( $r = -0.225/225$ ). After that, respectively, the components of the body itself (proportion) and attitude about weight with the total score (absence) of mental health show an inverse and significant relationship at the level of  $\alpha > 0.001$  ( $r = -0.196$  and  $r = -0.171$ ). Among the components of both variables, the most inverse and significant relationship is observed between the component of satisfaction with different parts of the body with physical symptoms at  $\alpha$  level  $< 0.001$  ( $r = 0.205$ ). Therefore, the sub-hypothesis of the research is confirmed.

The regression of body image with (lack of) mental health of married women is significant and can explain part of its variance ( $F = 32.769$ ,  $\alpha = 0.001$ ). This result shows that the regression coefficients are significant and there is enough evidence to confirm the hypothesis. Also, considering that  $R^2$  is the percentage of common variance of body image components in predicting (lack of) mental health, these components predict 14.9% of the variance (lack) of mental health.

The value of beta in the presented model indicates the amount of variance explanation of the predictor variable on the criterion. According to the standard beta coefficients, the biggest role and explanation on the (lack of) score of mental health is the responsibility of the total score of body image, so that with each unit change in its variance, as much as -0.192 in the variance of the (lack of) score of mental health. Change is made. After that, the component of satisfaction with different parts of the body has a contribution of -0.183 in predicting (lack of) mental health of married women. The components of the body itself and attitude about weight do not play a role in predicting (lack of) mental health at the same time.

### **Discussion**

The present study was conducted to investigate body image and its relationship with sexual performance and mental health in married women who are housewives.

One of the most important reasons for dissatisfaction with the body in women is the unrealistic ideal symbol of female beauty in recent years, which mainly emphasizes thinness, and this excessive thinness is unattainable for most women. Since this ideal image is far from reality, it leads to a decrease in self-confidence, mental health, and intimacy, and marital sexual function. The existence of weak and negative physical self-concepts and body image in housewives makes them focus on their problems, not think about other solutions and opportunities, and pessimistically examine current negative experiences. By creating body dissatisfaction and a negative self-concept, women will demand a change in their body image to bring their real body image closer to their ideal body image. Distorted body images can affect a person's physical and mental health,

and constant dissatisfaction with body image and negative self-concept can greatly reduce a person's mental health and sexual performance. On the other hand, positive self-concept and body image can increase the mental health and sexual performance of housewives.

Dissatisfaction with body image reduces mental health and makes a person susceptible to depression, anxiety and other mental disorders. To explain this finding, it can be said that one of the important aspects of women's mental health formation is their physical appearance and body image. Body image is a mental picture that a person has of his physical appearance and body, and it is caused by positive and negative feelings of a person about his body shape and body.

What kind of image women have of themselves, regardless of whether this image is related to what a person sees about himself or is formed from the feedback of others, has a great impact on a person's performance in sexual affairs and sexual performance. In the same direction and line with the current research results, Rogers considers body image to be an organized and stable pattern of perceptions that determines the way of life.

Body image affects the marital relations of housewives with their husbands. Compared to women who have a strong and positive body image and are satisfied with their body image, housewives who have a weak body image will have a completely different view of marital relations and sexual performance.

### **Ethics**

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed.

## Acknowledgement

The cooperation of all participants in the research is thanked and appreciated.

## Conflict of Interest

According to the authors, this article has no financial sponsor or conflict of interest.

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