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Investigation between body image, self-esteem and healthy diet

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Diet-related subjects are constantly reported through various media outputs with an explosion of interest in body image and various eating behaviours. Social constructs, portrayed through the media, have been shown to be associated with eating behaviours, body image, and self esteem and evidence shows women are more likely to pursue the “thin beauty ideal”⁽¹⁾. There are no known studies that have investigated the difference in gender and the relationship of “dieting” on self-esteem and body satisfaction in a Cypriot population. The main aim of this pilot study, therefore, investigated the effect of gender on self-esteem in relation to “dieting”. Participants ($n = 100$) were asked to complete a questionnaire on general information about their “dieting” status and a second questionnaire to investigate self esteem. Questionnaires were scored and statistical analysis employed: Chi-Squared Tests, Independent Sample T-Tests and Pearson correlation (SPSS, V17.0).

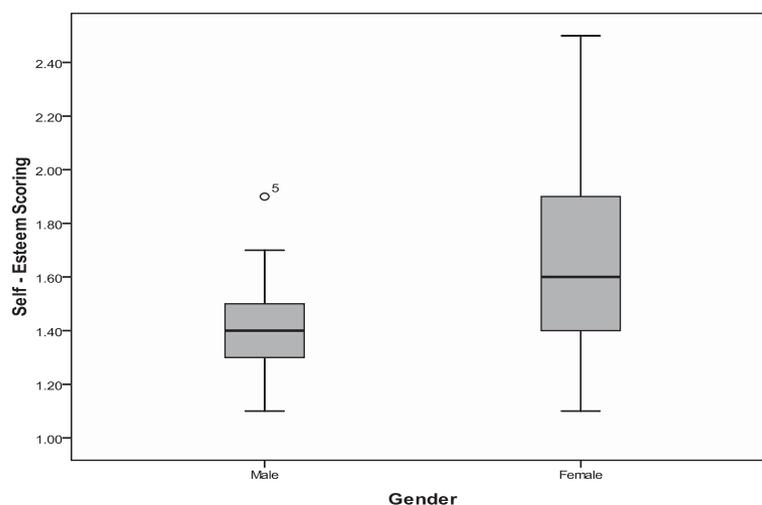


Fig. 1. Gender differences in self-esteem.

Results showed an overall significant correlation between the amount of times a “diet” had been attempted and overall self-esteem score ($R = 0.40$, $p = 0.01$)*, with women showing a greater amount of “dieting” attempts ($F = 4.2 \pm 3.6$, $M = 1.9 \pm 1.2$, $p = 0.001$) and males to have greater overall self-esteem score ($M = 1.4 \pm 0.15$ vs. $F = 1.67 \pm 0.39$, $P = 0.000$)* (Figure 1). This pilot study has shown that females have lower self esteem and are more likely to repeatedly attempt weight loss. This study is in agreement with previous work in that women pursue the thin ideal, are dissatisfied with their bodies and this related to lower self-esteem⁽²⁾. The current study adds to the literature showing a correlation with the amount of “dieting” attempts and low-self esteem in a Cypriot population. Evidence suggests societies are one of the reasons why people have low self-esteem. They reflect the pursuit of cultural and gender explicit body shape ideals where males tend to desire a muscular physique and women a thinner physique⁽²⁾. In conclusion, this study has shown that in a Cypriot population women are more likely to “diet” and have lower self esteem compared to men and dieting may be a predictor of low self-esteem. While there is evidence to suggest media may play a role in the different behaviours of the two genders, further studies are warranted to investigate this phenomenon in this population.

*For self-esteem a low score = higher self-esteem.

1. Lóópez-Guimeràà *et al.* (2010) Influence of Mass Media on Body Image and Eating Disordered Attitudes and Behaviors in Females: A Review of Effects and Processes. *Media Psychology* 13(4), 387–416.
2. Furnham *et al.* (2002) Body Image Dissatisfaction: Gender Differences in Eating Attitudes, Self-Esteem, and Reasons for Exercise. *The Journal of Psychology: Interdisciplinary and Applied* 136(6), 581–596.