

# HIGH PREVALENCE OF NEGATIVE MOOD AND BODY DISSATISFACTION AMONG BRAZILIAN ADOLESCENTS AND WOMEN

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**ABSTRACT** — In Brazil, the prevalence of anxiety is the world's highest and depression ranking fifth. In the same manner, body image disorders are very frequent. This article briefly review and discusses the phenomena of body image disorder and its role on mood disorders. Body dissatisfaction is very frequent among girls, adolescents and women in Brazil which constitutes an important risk factor for both mood and affective disorders.

**KEYWORDS** — body image, mood disorders, suicide, depression.

## INTRODUCTION

During the past decades and even today, Brazil has the highest rates of psychiatric disorders in Latin American region, with greater incidence and prevalence of anxiety, depression and mood disorders. In fact, Brazil is the world's leader of anxiety disorders prevalence and the fifth of depression prevalence [1].

Since there is no significant genetic difference in Brazilian population that explains the higher incidence of anxiety and depression, the role of social determinants must be crucial and very effective as important causes of mental disorders in Brazil.

In a nation with poor education rates, poverty, excessive freedom to social media and marketing, higher rates of social violence, increased consumption of alcohol, and drugs of abuse and addiction, and lack of effective health promotion programs for children and adolescents, it has been expected that mental health problems have a greater magnitude and incidence since the early life [2, 3].

Furthermore, excessive freedom of communication media, the cultural sexism and patriarchal gender inequality associated with a permissive culture contributes to vulgarization and exploitation of bodies of children, adolescents and women [4–6].

In a similar manner that found in other nations, mental health problems had been affected more

women, especially those subjects with poor education, lower income and precarious working conditions [7, 8]. It is important to emphasize that higher levels of aggressiveness and anxiety had been observed in Brazilian since the childhood and early adolescence [9].

Considering that anxiety and other mental disorders are very frequent in Brazil and that this country is one of the world leaders on plastic/cosmetic surgeries, the objective of this work was to briefly discuss the association of body dissatisfaction and mood disorders.

## MOOD DISORDERS AMONG BRAZILIAN FEMALES: HOW FREQUENT THEY ARE?

Mood disorders as well as anxiety and physical and psychological violence, are frequent among Brazilian children and adolescents. A study in Santa Catarina, South Brazil, reported 27.7% of intrafamilial violence, 12.61% of anxiety, 11.71% of aggressive behaviour, and 3.38% of depressive mood (6.2% among girls and only 2% among boys) among children [9].

In Spain, a study with adolescents reported that depression (16%), alcohol abuse (11%), bipolar disorder (7%), and drug addiction (5%) affected that population [10].

A study in Barra do Garças (MT), Central-Western Brazil, found that 86% of the adolescents had frequent mood oscillations and that 18% of them reported weekly use of alcohol and/or tobacco [11].

The ERICA study, a population-based study with Brazilian adolescents found a prevalence of common mental disorders of 30%, which was higher among girls (38.4%) than boys (21.6%) [12].

Living in a violent and sick society, it is reasonable that mood disorders should increase with age. Then, another study, with adult patients attended at a basic health unit in Rio Grande do Sul, South Brazil, the frequency of negative mood reached 40.1% [7].

## BODY DISSATISFACTION AMONG GIRLS AND WOMEN

A 2012's project with adolescents from the Middle Araguaia region, Legal Amazon, observed higher body dissatisfaction and lower self-esteem among adolescents, especially between girls [13].

Similar results were found regarding adult men and women. Studying 61 men and 79 women, from Barra do Garças (MT), it was verified that women were much more dissatisfied with their bodies compared to the men [14].

It is important to note that body dissatisfaction changes with age or generation. Elderly women presented high body satisfaction (83.33) compared with women at middle age (58.33%) [15]. It is possible that body dissatisfaction decreases with age since the social pressures to women's body also diminish. More studies are needed in this area.

A recent study covering a multiethnic population comprised by university students of the Central-Western Brazil showed that afro-american women were devalued compared to afro-american men and white men and women [16]. In the same study, both white women and men were more appreciated compared to afro-american people, but men received more positive values than women [16].

Evaluating 855 adolescents (466 female, 389 male), of 14 to 19 years-old, from the public schools of the Middle Araguaia Region, it was reported that only 60% were satisfied with their bodies, whereas the body dissatisfaction was highest among girls/women compared to boys/men [17].

A population-based study covering 4,325 adolescents of 14 and 15 years-old in Pelotas (RS), South Brazil, showed a body dissatisfaction of 51% among boys and 65.6% among girls [18].

### BODY DISSATISFACTION AND MOOD DISORDERS: A RISK FOR SUICIDE?

Social media and marketing exert strongest pressures against female adolescents to lose or maintain weight at any cost, as well as they also forces males to gain weight and muscle body mass [19]. In this manner, the body dissatisfaction with a thin body was higher among men, whereas the body dissatisfaction with a heavier body was higher among women in a sample of South Brazil [20]. This female body coercion begins during childhood and increases in the late adolescence and early adult life, causing suffering, mood disorders, lower self-esteem and depression [21, 22].

Analysing 371 adolescents of 12 to 16 years-old from Juiz de Fora (MG), Southeast Brazil, Fortes et al. [23] reported that body image dissatisfaction was positively correlated with both mood state and perfectionism.

Evaluating body image during one year, Fortes et al. [24] observed that body dissatisfaction among girls increased over the time, whereas among boys it was decreased.

A longitudinal study covering 598 adolescents (269 girls and 329 boys) from Juiz de Fora, Rio Pomba and Barbacena cities (MG), Southeastern Brazil, showed that body dissatisfaction was higher among girls compared to boys, and that this dissatisfaction in girls was associated with increased prevalence of disordered eating and depressive symptoms [25].

Furthermore, body dissatisfaction and incorrect weight perception has been also associated with drive to be thinness, lower self-esteem, disordered eating (anorexia and bulimia) and unnecessary and irrational use of weight loss drugs and aesthetic surgeries [26–28].

A study with university students from Botucatu, São Paulo State, Southeastern Brazil, observed that one third of students had body image dissatisfaction and they also found a positive association between social anxiety disorder and body image dissatisfaction [29].

Beyond psychological sadness, body image dissatisfaction was also correlated with ideation, planning and attempt to suicide, especially among female than males [30].

### CONCLUSION

Body image dissatisfaction can cause mood disorders, affective disorders and even suicide tendencies. It is urgent to improve health promotion activities which can foster positive body image deconstructing the imposed models of “beauty” and “ugliness”.

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