A Research Paper on

IMPACT OF BEAUTY STANDARDS ON MENTAL HEALTH OF WOMEN

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Abstract

Mental Health is a major concern which is often ignored in the Indian Society. Although we live in the 21st century but Mental Health is still considered a Taboo in most of the households of our country. One of the major causes of deteriorating mental health within the population is Beauty Standards set by the Society and the Media. With this research paper, we have tried to evaluate the impact of these beauty standards on the women who are affected the most by them, almost on a regular basis. For the collection of data, a primary survey was conducted with 200 women of all age groups including school going youngsters, university students, home makers, working professionals, elderly women. We have tried to differentiate the extent to which women of different age groups are affected by these societal standards. Descriptive and Inferential Analysis have been performed on the collected data. For the Descriptive part, various tables, charts and figures (pie charts, bar graphs, histograms etc.) have been used and explained. For the Statistical (Inferential) Analysis, ANOVA framework has been applied. The different age groups are coded and interpreted using the ANOVA results. For comparing the impact within different age groups, a Post Hoc Analysis has been done using Dunnett's T3 test. The major domains we have focussed on are societal standards and media standards. With this research paper, we have tried to analyse and explore a social topic which isn't often talked about openly.

Key Words: Beauty Standards, Mental Health, Taboo, Media, Societal Standards

I. INTRODUCTION

Beauty has always been a subjective topic. There is no general definition of beauty till date. However, there seems to be consensus in every society in every era around what beauty is. The historical murals, sculptures and writings depicting perfect body ideals, with large eyes, fairly round face, perfectly fair skinned, elaborately platted hair, thin waists and wider posterior, 'S-shaped' curved bodies, wearing corsets for perfect body shape and having 'shingaar' on, have set beauty norms since the ancient times. In modern times, these consensuses have become so rigid that they have been transformed into standards. The concept of 'fair and lovely', wider posterior, slim and perfectly toned body, wide lips continue to prevail as ideal body norms. The situation is especially appalling for women.

Women have been treated as an object for millennia. For them, these standards have

always been about *"what to wear"* and *"how to look"* (Rebecca Gelles). They are subjected to these standards from a very tender age and therefore end up becoming insecure in their daily lives. Constant and prolonged exposure to such judgement and standards creates frustration and disappointment among women (Madhusmita Das et al.).

These insecurities have been further reinforced due to immense growth and intense competition in beauty (cosmetic) industry where advertisements by giant corporations are constantly triggering people's insecurities and constantly signalling them to buy their products. The beauty pageants, media's portrayal of long haired, fair skinned, slender and tall women as successful, and the harsh societal norms continue to hinder the growth and empowerment of women.

With this understanding, we aim to prepare our research on *'Impact of Beauty Standards on Mental Health of Women'.*

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media& Mass Media are all pervasive and are always seeking out to grab people's attention. Every day, people are constantly bombarded with images of "perfect-looking" models and actors. The advertisement industry is growing rapidly, thriving on people's vulnerability to buy into the 'beauty myth' that is stereotyped by the media. Since body image

has emerged as a core aspect of mental and physical well-being, many psychological surveys and researches have been conducted by scholars to measure the impact of the media on mental health of women globally. There are contradicting views regarding the impact of media, considered extremely negative on the psychology of women by some researchers while considered motivating by others. By conducting primary surveys and hypothesis testing on college women, it is found out that the cosmetic industry does have a significant impact on women, they are the major consumer of beauty products but the study found no correlation between self-esteem and an individual's cosmetic usage, habits and beliefs **(Britton 2012).** The obsession with fair skin is also an example of how these foreign concepts of beauty are modifying the way Indians define an attractive appearance. In the present day, the urban Indian woman has a cacophony of voices telling her how she should look, from television and Bollywood to fashion magazines and her family. Even average well educated urban Indian females have skin color in mind while undergoing day-to-day functions, let alone the ones with lesser exposure or education or belonging from rural areas which still holds the majority of Indian population. It is easier for such women to get influenced even faster and end up spending part of their earning in buying fairness products under media influence

wanting to transform their lives. **(Rebecca 2011)**

Obsession with fair skin and the advertisements promoting fairness creams create an inferiority complex in the minds of women thereby, creating a prejudiced racial opinion towards dark complexion skin. These types of prejudices and internalization of unhealthy beauty standards lead to self- objectification among women of all age groups, especially young women. Furthermore, high levels of parental criticism and other communication dysfunction in families is also seen as a significant predictor of physical perfectionism in children**. (Kavita 2008)** The cultural standards of beauty in India are narrowing and conforming to more international standards, and these changes are causing new physical and psychological problems to be introduced into Indian society. The models shown in advertisements send a constant message that women must sacrifice their physical and psychological health to be considered attractive by societal standards which creates frustration and disappointment for women and leads to unhealthy eating behaviors. (*Andrea, 2021*)

Thus, the social media, cinema and advertisements are more demotivating than inspiring to get a fit body. The "perfect body" standards set by the society affects the mental health of women, especially the younger ones, making them feel sad and depressed about their bodies which in turn, leads to negative eating habits and behavioral changes among them.

III. THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Beauty standards have always existed in our society. Idealisation and expectation of a perfect body were always there, irrespective of the era. Although, the definition and the standards set by the society for a "perfect body" have changed gradually. **(Rebecca 2011)** Researchers have tried to analyse the causes and impacts of this chase for a "perfect body" using diverse quantitative and qualitative methods emphasising majorly on the young population. These studies discuss the self-objectification and low self-esteem of women due to the internalisation of these societal standards and the negative impacts on their mental health and behaviours. (*Andrea, 2021*). It is believed that young women are more conscious about their body image and are affected the most, on a daily basis. Through a primary survey, we have tried to focus on all the age groups of women, checking the impact of societal pressure and the media and entertainment industry on their self-esteem and perception towards their body. Obsession with fair skin, perfect curves and body shapes, societal pressure and self-esteem are some of the factors that have been focussed in this

study, to understand the psychological effects of beauty standards set by society on women.

IV. OBJECTIVES

1.To analyze women's perception of beauty standards affecting their mental health.

2.To study if there are any significant differences in the impact of beauty standards on the mental health of women of different age groups.

3.To analyze the impact of perfect body ideals set by media on mental health of women.

V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For our research, we carried out *primary research method* in order to get a first-hand experience of views of women regarding the topic.

For our primary survey, we developed a questionnaire which has been attached in the appendix. The questionnaire covers two sections which are '*Beauty Standards, Self Esteem, and Society'* covering various aspect related to women and their opinions about their beauty and the pressure they get from society; and *'Beauty Standards, Media and Entertainment'* covering various aspects related to media pressure on women about beauty norms and impact of fashion magazines and beauty pageants. We received 200 responses from women of different age groups.

Using *Likert Scale* for opinion-based questions, and general and leading questions to make questionnaire more effective for respondents to answer and relate to, the survey was administered using *Google Forms.*

Responses were gathered from women of all age groups. We used a combination of sampling techniques including *Random Sampling, Convenience Sampling and* the method of *Snowball Sampling*. The combination of these sampling techniques made sample collection effective and helped in reaching varied audience.

For statistical analysis, we have used *Linear Regression* for our First Major Objective. For further Minor Objectives, we have used *ANOVA Framework* to test our hypothesis.

For our Second Major Objective, we have again used *Linear Regression* for testing our hypothesis.

Along with the statistical analysis, we have also done descriptive analysis, for our research being based on opinions and mindset of women, to have a clearer understanding of the psychological effect of beauty standards on their mental health.

Hypothesis:

Following are the hypothesis considered for conducting the research:

1. There are significant differences in the impact of societal beauty standards on the
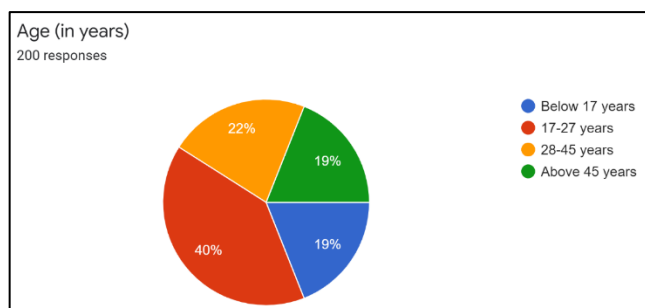
mental health of women of different age groups.

2. Media holds a significant impact regarding beauty standards on mental health of women.

VI. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

a. <u>DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS</u>

Let us look at the age distribution of the 200 respondents:

Fig. 1: Age distribution of the 200 respondents

Source: Calculated Using Survey Data

The distribution of the respondents is as follows:

Below 17 years: 38

17-27 years: 80

28-45 years: 44

Above 45 years: 38

Using a mix of 2-3 sampling methods, gave us access to respondents as shown above.

Let us now look at the responses received in the 'Beauty Standards, Self Esteem and Society' Section:

Table 1: Number of Responses

Question	1 (SD)	2	3	4	5 (SA)
I am not satisfied with the way I look.	96	50	32	14	8
I compare myself to others in the matter of my looks.	85	49	32	21	13
I get affected by what others think about my appearances.	72	66	36	16	10
I look at myself more than five times in the mirror.	69	45	34	14	38
I am not satisfied with my weight.	63	48	28	29	32
I am insecure about my body type and body parts.	101	40	21	24	14
If given an option to change a part of your body (or even reduce weight), through surgery or any other medical aids, I will opt for that option.	129	19	16	27	9
I have considered taking/ have taken diet plans to reduce or increase my weight only because my family, relatives or friends made me feel that I was 'too fat' or 'too thin'.	106	30	28	23	13
I am not happy about my skin tone.	126	32	29	8	5
I often face pressure from my family, relatives, friends, or society at large about my skin tone.	156	13	16	11	4
I use fairness creams often.	159	16	9	12	2
I spend a lot of time on making my skin tone 'fairer'.	157	18	11	10	4
I use makeup to 'hide' my blemishes, lines, wrinkles, etc. to look younger and prettier/ more handsome out of societal pressure.	132	32	19	14	3

Source: Calculated Using Survey Data

Through the above table, we can deduce the following statements:

- A majority of women are satisfied with the way they look, but there still remains a significant number who are not as satisfied.

- A small, yet significant number of women compare their looks to others and get affected by what others think about them.

- Women are concerned about their looks a lot that they look in the mirror more than five times.

- Only 63 women can say that they are truly satisfied with their weight. Rest remain either unsure, or not satisfied.

- 101 women can say that they are genuine not insecure about their body type and body parts, while the rest have mixed reviews.
- In any circumstance only 9 women agree that they will be ready to go through surgery or any other medical aid, if given a chance to alter their body through that means.
- Although 106 women strongly agree that their decision of taking diet plans or considering taking diet plans is entirely their own, there are 13 women as well who strongly disagree to the statement, that they do face pressure from family, relatives and friends regarding taking up diet plans.
- Majority of women are happy about their skin tone , hence, do not spend a lot of time on making their skin tone 'fairer', and do not use fairness creams too often, and do not have to hide their blemishes, lines, wrinkles, etc. through makeup.
- A large proportion of women (156 out of 200 women) strongly disagree to the fact that they often face pressure from family, relatives, friends, or society at large about their skin tone.

Through the above table and statements, we can see that although a majority of women act according to their free will without getting influenced by societal standards or the opinions set by family, relatives and friends, there are still few women who face these societal standards and get affected by these standards.

Now let us look at the responses in the 'Beauty Standards, Media and Entertainment' Section:
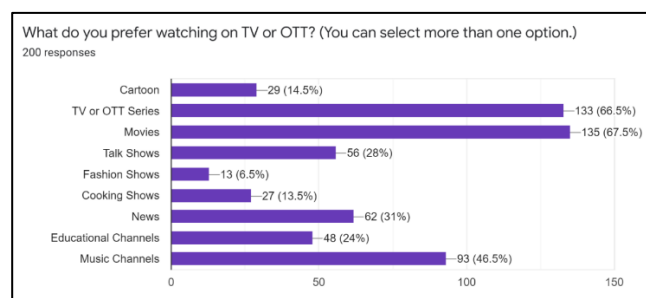
Fig. 2: Time spent watching TV/OTT
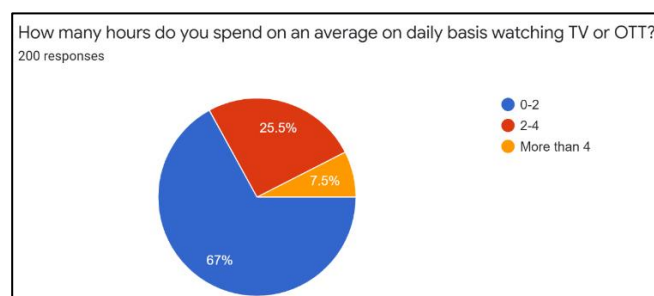
Source: Calculated Using Survey Data

Majority of population watches TV/ OTT for less than 4 hours.
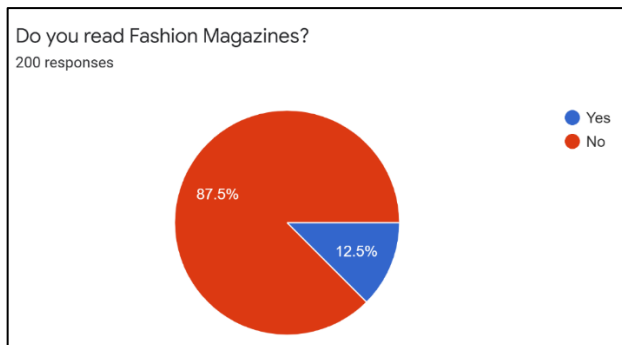
Fig. 3: Preference of Programs on TV/OTT

Source: Calculated Using Survey Data

The above graph shows that people (women) consider TV/OTT as a means of entertainment and prefer watching Series or Movies or Music. Only 6.5% watch Fashion Shows.
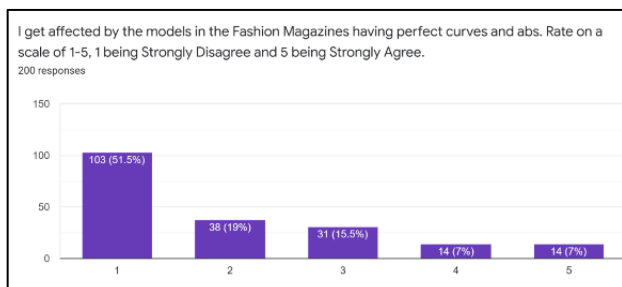
Fig. 4: % of Fashion Magazines Readers

Do you read Fashion Magazines?
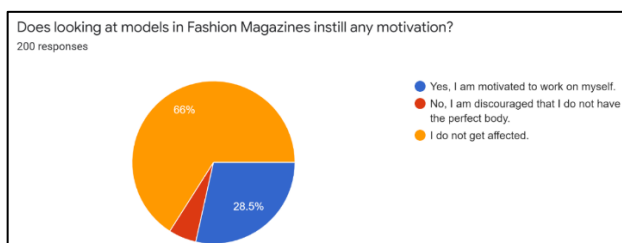200 responses
● Yes
● No
87.5%
12.5%

Source: Calculated Using Survey Data

Fig. 5: Influence of Fashion Models

I get affected by the models in the Fashion Magazines having perfect curves and abs. Rate on a scale of 1-5, 1 being Strongly Disagree and 5 being Strongly Agree.
200 responses
103 (51.5%)
38 (19%)
31 (15.5%)
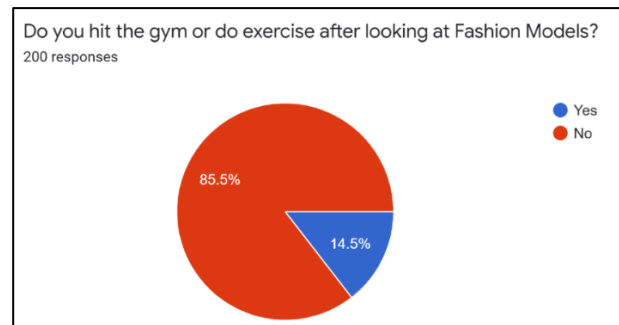14 (7%)
14 (7%)

Source: Calculated Using Survey Data

Out of 200 women, only 25 read Fashion Magazines and 24 agree that they get affected by the Fashion models having perfect curves and abs.

Fig. 6: Motivation by Fashion Models

Does looking at models in Fashion Magazines instill any motivation?
200 responses
● Yes, I am motivated to work on myself.
● No, I am discouraged that I do not have the perfect body.
● I do not get affected.
66%
28.5%

Source: Calculated Using Survey Data

Fig. 7: Exercise influenced by Fashion Models

Do you hit the gym or do exercise after looking at Fashion Models?
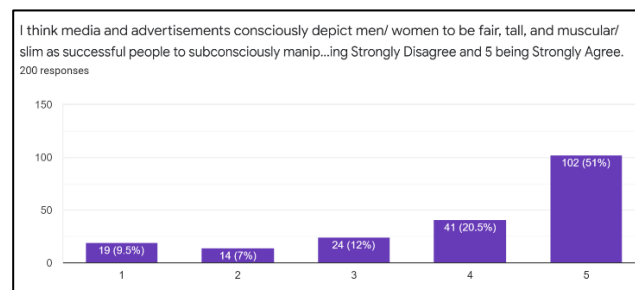200 responses
● Yes
● No
85.5%
14.5%

Source: Calculated Using Survey Data

Out of 200 women, 11 get negatively motivated and 57 get positive motivation after looking at models in the Fashion Magazines.

Again, out of 200 women, 29 women get positively motivated to hit the gym or do exercise after looking at Fashion Models.

Fig. 8: Media's Portrayal of perfect body

I think media and advertisements consciously depict men/ women to be fair, tall, and muscular/ slim as successful people to subconsciously manip...ing Strongly Disagree and 5 being Strongly Agree.
200 responses
19 (9.5%)
14 (7%)
24 (12%)
41 (20.5%)
102 (51%)

Source: Calculated Using Survey Data

Out of 200 women, 143 agree that media and advertisements consciously depict men/women to be fair, tall, and muscular/ slim as successful people to subconsciously manipulate about a certain body type. The other 24 women remain neutral about the opinion and 33 disagree about the same.

Fig. 9: Take on Beauty Pageants

Source: Calculated Using Survey Data

Fig. 11
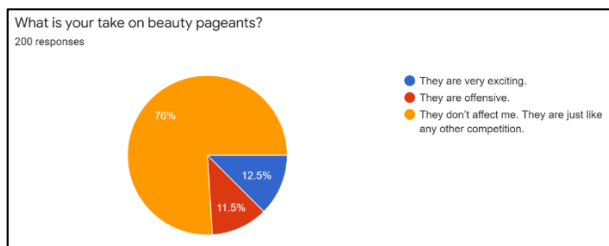
Out of 200 respondents, 23 find the idea of beauty pageants offensive, 25 find it thrilling and the rest remain unaffected, considering it like any other competition.

b. INFERENTIAL ANALYSIS

The Age Groups are coded as:
Below 17: 1.0
17-27: 2.0
28-45: 3.0
Above 45: 4.0

Objective 2
Hypothesis Testing

Null Hypothesis (H0): There are no significant differences between the impact of beauty standards set by society on different age groups.

Alternate Hypothesis (HA): There are significant differences between the impact of beauty standards set by society on different age groups.

- The P-Value comes out to be 0.000077 which is less than the significance level (0.05) which shows there are significant differences in the impact on different age groups.
- By looking at the mean values of the total points of different age groups, we can see there are different impacts of beauty standards set on different age groups. The females of the age group 17-27 are affected the most and the females of the age group above 45 are affected the least by these beauty standards.

Fig. 12

- By looking at the ANOVA table, we can easily say that there are significant differences in the impact of beauty standards on different age groups.

Now we compare each age group with all other age groups using **Dunnett's T3** Test under **Post Hoc Analysis**:

Post Hoc Tests

Multiple Comparisons

Dependent Variable: Total
Dunnett T3

(I) Age	(J) Age	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval Lower Bound	95% Confidence Interval Upper Bound
1.00	2.00	-.93816	1.52072	.990	-5.0212	3.1449
	3.00	3.50957	1.52840	.136	-.6110	7.6301
	4.00	5.55263*	1.46342	.002	1.5986	9.5066
2.00	1.00	.93816	1.52072	.990	-3.1449	5.0212
	3.00	4.44773*	1.45931	.017	.5416	8.3539
	4.00	6.49079*	1.39111	.000	2.7649	10.2167
3.00	1.00	-3.50957	1.52840	.136	-7.6301	.6110
	2.00	-4.44773*	1.45931	.017	-8.3539	-.5416
	4.00	2.04306	1.39949	.610	-1.7279	5.8140
4.00	1.00	-5.55263*	1.46342	.002	-9.5066	-1.5986
	2.00	-6.49079*	1.39111	.000	-10.2167	-2.7649
	3.00	-2.04306	1.39949	.610	-5.8140	1.7279

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Fig. 13

By looking at the above table, we can interpret the following things:
- There is a significant difference between the impact of beauty standards on age groups 'Below 17' and 'Above 45'.
- There is a significant difference between the impact of beauty standards on age groups '17-27' and 'Above 45'.

With the help of ANOVA, we conclude that the extent to which females of different age groups are affected by the beauty standards set by the society is different and the adult females in the age group 17-27 are affected the most whereas the older females of age above 45 are affected the least by these beauty standards.

Thus, we reject our Null Hypothesis. There are significant differences in the impact of beauty standards set by society on the mental health of women of different age groups.

Objective 3
Hypothesis Testing
Null Hypothesis (H0): There is no significant impact of beauty standards set by the media on females.

Alternate Hypothesis (HA): There is a significant impact of beauty standards set by the media on females.

For checking the impact of beauty standards set by media on females, we have conducted a linear regression analysis taking Age as the independent variable and Media Beauty Standards as the dependent variable:

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.197ᵃ	.039	.034	1.95659

a. Predictors: (Constant), Age

ANOVAᵃ

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	30.604	1	30.604	7.994	.005ᵇ
	Residual	757.991	198	3.828		
	Total	788.595	199			

a. Dependent Variable: Media
b. Predictors: (Constant), Age

Coefficientsᵃ

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Unstandardized Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	6.897	.361		19.121	.000
	Age	-.391	.138	-.197	-2.827	.005

a. Dependent Variable: Media

Fig. 14

- The P-Value comes out to be 0.005 which is less than the significance level (0.05) which shows the beauty standards set by the Media have an impact on the Mental Health of Women.
- R Square is 0.039 which depicts the model explains only 3.9% of the variation.
  For a stronger R Square Value, more data is required in the form of more questions focused on analysing the impact of beauty standards set by the Media.

Thus, we do reject the Null Hypothesis. There is a significant impact of beauty standards set by the media on females.

VII. CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

According to our study, Beauty Standards set by Society and Media hold a significant impact on the mental health of women. In case of statistical analysis, the impact can be established by looking just at the P-Values. The R Square values are not significant enough which means most of the variation in mental health cannot be explained by the age factor. Thus, there is some impact as per our findings but for a clearer understanding of the influence of the age factor on the mental health of women, we need more information.

The ANOVA analysis shows that there are significant differences in the impact of beauty standards on the mental health of women with different age groups. The women aged between 17 and 27 are affected the most by these beauty standards whereas the women aged more than 45 are affected the least by these beauty standards.

Through Descriptive Analysis, we infer that a majority of women act according to their free will without getting influenced by societal standards or the opinions set by family, relatives and friends, there are still few women who face these societal standards and get affected by these standards. This small proportion of women face standards set by society through imposed opinions by family, friends and relatives. The small proportion of the category also get influenced by the standards set by the media and advertising. The media holding a significant impact on forming/ manipulating the opinions of women about the successful personalities is significantly highlighted by majority of women as mentioned in the findings.

Thus, we can say that women today, besides facing the societal standards and standards set by media is advancing and empowering themselves to exercise free will and not be influenced by the standards set by others for them.

LIMITATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

There was a time constraint for carrying out the research and lack of access to women of different areas and fields and age groups made our study restricted. Thus, we would advise further researchers to broaden the areas of their study, considering multiple factors like gender, locality, profession etc, having a considerable amount of time at hand.

<u>APPENDIX</u>

<u>QUESTIONNAIRE:</u>

Age:
a.   10-17 (Children)
b.   18-27 (Young Population)
c.   28-45 (Adult Population)
d.   Above 45 (Elder Population)

<u>BEAUTY STANDARDS, SELF ESTEEM, AND SOCIETY</u>

Rate on a scale of 1-5, 1 being Strongly Disagree and 5 being Strongly Agree.
1. I am not satisfied with the way I look.
2. I compare myself to others in the matter of my looks.
3. I get affected by what others think about my appearances.
4. I look at myself more than five times in the mirror.
5. I am not satisfied with my weight.
6. I am insecure about my body type and body parts.
7. If given an option to change a part of your body (or even reduce weight), through surgery or any other medical aids, I will opt for that option.
8. I have considered taking/ have taken diet plans to reduce or increase my weight only because my family, relatives, or friends made me feel that I was 'too fat' or 'too thin'.
9. I am not happy about my skin tone.
10. I often face pressure from my family, relatives, friends, or society at large about my skin tone.
11. I use fairness creams often.
12. I spend a lot of time making my skin tone 'fairer'.
13. I use makeup to 'hide' my blemishes, lines, wrinkles, etc. to look younger and prettier/ more handsome out of societal pressure.

<u>BEAUTY STANDARDS, MEDIA AND ENTERTAINMENT</u>

14. How many hours do you spend watching TV?
a.   0-2
b.   2-4
c.   More than 4

15. What do you prefer watching on TV? (You can select more than one option.)
a.   Cartoon
b.   TV Series
c.   Movies
d.   Talk Shows
e.   Fashion Shows
f.   Cooking Shows
g.   News
h.   Educational Channels
i.   Music Channels

16. Do you read Fashion Magazines?
a. Yes
b. No

17. I get affected by the models in the Fashion Magazines having perfect curves and abs. Rate on a scale of 1-5, 1 being Strongly Disagree and 5 being Strongly Agree.

18. Does looking at models in Fashion Magazines instill any motivation?
a. Yes, I am motivated to work on myself.
b. No, I am discouraged that I do not have the perfect body.
c. I do not get affected.

19. Do you hit the gym or do exercise after looking at Fashion Models?
a. Yes
b. No

20. I think media and advertisements consciously depict men/ women to be fair, tall, and muscular/ slim as successful people to subconsciously manipulate about a certain body type. Rate on a scale of 1-5, 1 being Strongly Disagree and 5 being Strongly Agree.

21. What is your take on beauty pageants?
a. They are very exciting.
b. They are offensive.
c. They don't affect me. They are just like any other competition.

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