



The behaviour of personal development of rural women in relation to their physical appearance: A case study from the province of Tokat, Turkey

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Abstract

The objective of this study was to elucidate whether there is a link between BMI (Body Mass Index) and personal development of Turkish rural women. A questionnaire was conducted through personal interviews with 98 rural women living in Tokat province, Turkey. The women interviewed were divided into two groups based on their height and weight. Height and weight were used to compute BMI, which was divided into three categories: normal weight (BMI 18.5–24.9 kg/m²), overweight (BMI 25.0–29.9 kg/m²) and obesity (BMI ≥30 kg/m²). The first group included women with normal weight and the second included women who were overweight or obese. The results of this questionnaire demonstrate that there is a relationship between being of normal weight and efforts for personal development. The subject matter examined during the interview was as follows: a women's age, education level, marital status, and opportunity for spare time in which they could peruse their personal interests and hobbies in order to develop themselves. These opportunities for self-improvement included knowledge and use of computers and the Internet, leisure reading habits, the frequency of TV watching and the type of programming they viewed. A relationship was sought between BMI, their personal situations and the levels of self-improvement undertaken by the women interviewed. This relationship was articulated statistically by the use of Chi-square analysis. According to the results, younger women who have a normal weight tend to be better educated and unmarried. Women in this group have more spare time, have more knowledge about computers and the Internet and are in the habit of reading when compared to older, married, overweight or obese women.

Key words: Self esteem, self confidence, rural woman, body image.

Introduction

Many factors contribute to a person's ability to learn, including openness to new knowledge, enthusiasm and readiness to learn. Some personal characteristics that contribute to a person's desire to learn include a person's self-confidence and self-esteem. Other characteristics that contribute to learning include being loved, the ability to make friends, acceptance within society, being part of a group, ability to develop socially and intellectually, the ability to correct personal faults, the ability to set and achieve goals, persistence in the face of challenges, and the ability to know oneself¹.

It has been well established that self-confidence and self-esteem are important factors for learning. Additionally, they are considered to be of significant importance for open mindedness and personal development. In a recent study, it was observed that there is a correlation in women between their sense of capability and the responsibilities that they take within a group. This study concludes that self-esteem is a strong contributing factor to leadership within a group. Furthermore, women unwilling to take on responsibilities are not confident about their abilities, and this lack of confidence limits behaviours and roles within the group². Self-esteem and self-confidence are related to a person's acceptance of their physical appearance. In one investigation, it was found that body image affects women's self confidence regardless of the woman's race, ethnic group, social-economical status or culture. According to a questionnaire conducted by interviews with female university students, women struggle to

construct a positive self-image, and they often think that physical appearance is very essential in order to be accepted within society³.

Baturka *et al.*⁴ aimed at exploring attitudes and beliefs of 24 rural African-American women about body image and weight in order to inform clinicians and to support the design of more appropriate interventions. Twenty-four women were interviewed, and the results revealed that the majority of the respondents initially expressed some degree of dissatisfaction with their weight or body size. Of the 24 women interviewed, 71% clearly stated that they would like to lose weight. In explaining why they wanted to lose weight, many of them felt that losing weight would improve their self-esteem⁴.

It is necessary for the development of rural society to improve rural women's education level, openness to new knowledge, the awareness of developments within society, and their willingness to utilize resources that are increasingly becoming available to them. Rural women are different from urban women in the sense of their role in a society's structure and the cultural pursuits available to them. Physical appearance affects self-confidence, their levels of participation in society, and is reflected in the attitudes and behaviours of the individual. Many studies have compared rural with urban samples and drawn conclusions even though the operational definitions of rural and urban often differ widely. While several definitions of rural exist⁵⁻⁷, there are common elements throughout rural life: low population density; geographical

distance from large metropolitan areas; isolation; dense social networks; a culture of self-sufficiency; and fewer economic and manpower resources. How these characteristics affect manifestation, prevention and treatment of the behavioral health care needs of rural women will be explored. Farm women also do not distinguish between their roles as homemakers and farm workers, and their farm labor is often unreported. The demanding schedule of their responsibilities and roles leaves rural women little time to attend to their own needs or to seek out social support⁸.

Rural women are also less likely to engage in healthy lifestyle activities such as regular physical exercise and activity. They are more likely to be obese and think less favorably about their weight than urban women^{8,9}. In addition to these studies, there are many others which have referred to the correlation between the women's self-confidence and their physical appearances and rural women's position on this context¹⁰⁻¹³.

Taking the above-mentioned studies into consideration, it is possible to conclude that women's physical appearance can affect their self-confidence and thus their learning activities. It is also realized that rural women have different behavioural characteristics not only on physical appearance, self-confidence and self-esteem but also on learning and self-improvement. If rural women can gain some of the personal development features displayed by urban women, they will become more investigative, more likely to learn and become more enthusiastic about acquiring new knowledge. The objective of this study was to elucidate both a starting point and the mechanisms that should be utilized by rural women for personal development.

Materials and Methods

A questionnaire was conducted via personal interviews with 98 rural women living in Tokat province, Turkey. The women interviewed were divided into two groups based on their height and weight (i.e. Body Mass Index - BMI). Height and weight were used to compute BMI, which was divided into three categories: normal weight (BMI 18.5–24.9 kg/m²), overweight (BMI 25.0–29.9 kg/m²) and obesity (BMI ≥30 kg/m²). We will use the term of excess weight (BMI ≥25.0 kg/m²) when referring both to overweight and obese individuals¹⁴.

The first group included women with normal weight and the second one included women who were overweight or obese. The subject matter examined during the interview was as follows: a women's age, education level, marital status, and opportunity for spare time in which they could peruse their personal interests and hobbies in order to develop themselves. These opportunities for self-improvement included knowledge and use of computers and the Internet, leisure reading habits, the frequency of TV watching and the type of programming they viewed.

A relationship was sought between BMI, their personal situations and the levels of self-improvement undertaken by the women interviewed. This relationship was articulated statistically by the use of Chi-square analysis.

Results and Discussion

Two groups were formed based on participants' biomass index. The distribution and the relationship between the groups and the criteria used in this questionnaire are given in Table 1. The distribution of women's age is stable. Of the total number of women interviewed, a slightly higher number fell into the age group

between 31 and 50 years. Approximately the same proportion of women fell into the age categories 18-30 and 50+ years. However, if the women are categorized according to their biomass index, the distribution is different in that the highest number of women with a normal weight is seen in the 18-25 years age group. The chi-square analysis also shows that there is a strong relationship between a women's weight and their age. As expected, when women age they are increasingly likely to become overweight or obese. It is generally accepted that an increase in age is accompanied by weight gain and movement away from what might be considered ideal body measurements (i.e. a less attractive appearance). However, there is an increasing tendency for urban women to resist this negative change. Results from this study show that there is a low proportion of rural women, especially those over 50 years of age, within the normal weight category. In this age group, only one in 8 women has normal body measurements. It has been demonstrated that a strong relationship between age and weight exists. Our study supports this observation in that the women in our questionnaire do not try to keep ideal body measurements in old age.

Data related to the education level of the women questioned reveal that the majority of the women interviewed (88.78%) has either a primary school education or less. It is a very striking finding that all of the women who are overweight or obese have very low level of education. The chi-square test also shows that there is a strong relationship between education level and having an ideal weight. This study shows that women who take care of their physical appearance have a higher level of education.

It might be thought that physical appearance in the sense of being overweight or obese is not closely related to educational level. However, it is commonly recognized that the level of education has an influence on physical appearance: not just by the manner of dress, but also by body shape. Results obtained from this questionnaire support this contention.

Marriage, especially in countries where this institution places strict boundaries on women, is a restrictive factor in the likelihood a woman will take care of her physical self. However, the idea that every woman should take time for herself and that they should take care of their physical appearance is increasingly popular all over the world.

Since married women take on a lot of responsibilities, both in the house and on the farm, they have limited opportunity to take care of their physical appearance or to improve themselves in other ways. Table 1 demonstrates that not being married has a profound effect on women's physical appearance. All of the women who were not married have normal body measurements whereas 70.27% of married women are overweight or obese.

Questionnaires have revealed that if women make any effort to be more knowledgeable, to improve their skills and are knowledgeable about the events and developments in the world, then they change their behaviour in response to that knowledge. As a result, questions with regards to knowledge and social awareness were asked during the questionnaire (Table 1).

First we must consider if women have an opportunity for spare time. It seems obvious that people need to have spare time to be able to partake in any self-improvement activities. It has become more common in societies where individual rights and responsibilities are highly prevalent for people to be of the opinion that it is essential to have spare time to enjoy hobbies, undertake

Table 1. Relationship between BMI and women's social and educational characteristics.

	Normal weight		Over weight and obese		Total	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
<i>Age of women</i>						
18-30	26	68.42	3	5.00	29	29.59
31-50	8	21.05	28	46.67	36	36.74
51-+	4	10.53	29	48.33	33	33.67
Total	38	100.00	60	100.00	98	100.00
	$X^2: 45.654$		$X^2_{0.05; 2}: 5.991$			
<i>Education level</i>						
Primary school graduates or less	27	71.05	60	100.00	87	88.78
Secondary school graduates or more	11	28.95	0	0.00	11	11.22
Total	38	100.00	60	100.00	98	100.00
	$X^2: 19.564$		$X^2_{0.05; 1}: 3.841$			
<i>Marital status</i>						
Single	13	34.01	0	88.33	13	87.76
Married	25	65.79	60	11.67	85	12.24
Total	38	100.00	60	100.00	98	100.00
	$X^2: 23.666$		$X^2_{0.05; 1}: 3.841$			
<i>Availability of spare time</i>						
Have spare time	12	86.84	6	11.67	18	12.24
No spare time	26	13.16	54	88.33	80	87.76
Total	38	100.00	60	100.00	98	100.00
	$X^2: 7.225$		$X^2_{0.05; 1}: 3.841$			
<i>Personal curiosity and interests</i>						
Interested in improvement	16	42.10	19	31.67	35	35.72
Improve only house work	11	28.95	24	40.00	35	35.71
No interest in improvement	11	28.95	17	28.33	28	28.57
Total	38	100.00	60	100.00	98	100.00
	$X^2: 1.509$		$X^2_{0.05; 2}: 5.991$			
<i>Knowledge about computers</i>						
Have not seen a computer	3	7.89	17	28.33	20	20.41
Very little computer knowledge	18	47.37	29	48.33	47	47.96
Know about and/or use computers	17	44.74	14	23.34	31	31.63
Total	38	100.00	60	100.00	98	100.00
	$X^2: 10.137$		$X^2_{0.05; 2}: 5.991$			
<i>Knowledge about internet</i>						
No knowledge of the Internet	20	52.63	47	78.33	67	68.37
Know and/or use the Internet	18	47.37	13	21.67	31	31.63
Total	38	100.00	60	100.00	98	100.00
	$X^2: 7.106$		$X^2_{0.05; 1}: 3.841$			
<i>Reading habits</i>						
Does not read	9	23.69	33	55.00	42	42.86
Very limited reading	21	55.26	25	41.67	46	46.94
Has a habit of reading	8	21.05	2	3.33	10	10.20
Total	38	100.00	60	100.00	98	100.00
	$X^2: 13.399$		$X^2_{0.05; 2}: 5.991$			
<i>Intensity of watching TV</i>						
No or very little interested in TV	16	42.11	23	38.33	39	39.80
Watching too much TV	22	57.89	37	61.67	59	60.20
Total	38	100.00	60	100.00	98	100.00
	$X^2: 0.138$		$X^2_{0.05; 1}: 3.841$			
<i>Educational and personal development</i>						
<i>TV programs</i>						
Does not watch these kinds of programs	10	26.32	21	35.00	31	31.63
Watches ones related to housework	4	10.53	6	10.00	10	10.21
Watches this kind of program	24	63.16	33	55.00	57	58.16
Total	38	100.00	60	100.00	98	100.00
	$X^2: 0.827$		$X^2_{0.05; 2}: 5.991$			

personal care or to develop knowledge about subjects of personal interest. People who have spare time are more likely to take care of their physical appearance. Therefore, it seems that having spare time is related to both physical appearance and personal development.

According to this study, the majority (87.76%) of the women interviewed do not have spare time. It is not uncommon to find that women in developing countries, especially rural women, do not have the opportunity to indulge in personal interests. The BMI of the women investigated reveals that the majority of women

(86.84%) who have a normal weight have spare time (88.33%), whereas those who are overweight or obese do not have any spare time. The chi-square analysis also shows that physical appearance is highly correlated with having spare time in women.

Curiosity and interest are the main reasons people become interested in personal development and enthusiastic about learning and acquiring new knowledge. The interview was designed to try and determine women's personal interest and hobbies. The interviewer asked if the women have any interests and if they made any efforts to learn about subjects that held their interest, such as: agricultural production, housework and management, nursing, general concerns facing the country, economical problems, events and developments in Turkey and in the rest of the world, and artistic and cultural events. The answers to these questions have been divided into three groups: those who are not interested in anything and are not interested in improving themselves, those who are only interested in housework and household management, and those who are interested not only in housework but are also interested in at least one of the other subjects listed and make an effort to learn more about that subject. Approximately 1 in 3 women (35.72%) has outside interests and is concerned about improving their knowledge, skills and experiences outside their daily work routine. The study reveals that there is no relationship between a woman's weight and her interest in improving herself. There is no statistical correlation between these two factors. However, the data obtained (Table 1) indicate that the percentage of women who have a normal weight also tend to be more likely to be interested in improving their personal knowledge and experience.

The use of computers and the Internet is currently one of the best and most prevailing methods in which one can communicate with the external world, obtain knowledge and to follow world events. It seems important for women in the questionnaire area to change and improve themselves, and the interviewer asked if they have any knowledge or experience with computers or the Internet. This study has found that 1 out of 3 women interviewed have experience using computers. They tend to use these devices for communication with their acquaintances and for writing at an elementary level; thus, it seems this technology is an asset in rural area. According to our observations from these interviews the main reason for the introduction of the Internet into rural areas was as a visual communication device and as entertainment for children and teenagers.

Since there is a relationship between physical appearance and personal development it might be assumed that women with a normal weight are more likely to follow new technology and to be more likely to use facilities which provide computers and have access to the Internet. This presumed relationship was tested statistically. According to the results of the chi-square test, physical appearance is highly related to computer knowledge and experience with the Internet and the use of facilities that provide this technology. According to the results, it is obvious that women interested in computers and the Internet also belong to the group of women who have a normal weight. The proportion of women who are not interested in the Internet is very high in the group of women who are overweight or obese.

Television is a technology that has entered the daily lives of almost everyone and it the device that occupies many people's spare time. Based on an individual's reason for using this

technology, it can be beneficial for personal development or have harmful effects. It was thought that the amount of TV watched and the type of the programs chosen might be related to a woman's efforts at personal development. Therefore, during the interviews, their attitudes and usage of television was questioned. Women who do not watch a great amount of TV chose only to watch the programs they most enjoyed and watched TV for only a short time daily or weekly. Women who watch a great deal of TV watch almost every day and they spent most of their time in front of the television. Prathab and Ponnusamy found that traditional media have a slight edge over new media in terms of influencing knowledge gain and television is the most effective treatment, followed by newspaper, internet and radio¹⁵.

It has been determined that the BMI of the selected groups is not statistically related to either the amount of TV watched or to the types of programs chosen. In this study, there is no statistical difference in the amount of TV watched between women of normal weight or those who are overweight or obese. However, the proportion of women of normal weight who do not watch TV or only watch the programs for personal development is slightly higher than the proportion of women who are overweight or obese.

Conclusions

The objective of education is to make an improvement in people behaviour. One result of improved education is an improvement in the physical appearance of people. People's appearance improves as a result of improved education. On the other hand, continuing education starts with an improvement in physical appearance, which is the result of a person's self-esteem and self-confidence. This successive relationship is a result of the idea that there is a relationship between physical appearance and efforts for personal development and improved levels of knowledge.

The results of this questionnaire demonstrate that there is a relationship between being of normal weight and efforts for personal development. According to the results, younger women who have a normal weight tend to be better educated and unmarried. Women in this group have more spare more time, have more knowledge about computers and the Internet and are in the habit of reading when compared to older, married, overweight or obese women.

The education of rural women is most often focused on the subjects regarding their daily work. However, if efforts focus on an individual's level of education and make efforts to consider a woman's self esteem and confidence then the education of rural women can be viewed as dealing with more than just daily tasks. Like urban women, rural women can also receive education that will help them improve their self-identity in ways that improve self-esteem and allows them to prioritize continuous learning and personal development. This type of education can have fundamental and positive influences on their lives. Rural development is primarily dependent on the development and qualifications of human resources available in these areas.

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