Students’ Perception On the Influence of the Ideal ‘Media Body Image On Their Self-Esteem and Subsequent Choice of Clothing: The Case Of Kirinyaga University

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ABSTRACT
This study examined the perception of university students on their body appearance in relation to what the media portrays as ‘ideal body image’. University students spend considerable time on social and mainstream media where they observe, like and share the images portrayed by the media as ‘ideal image’. Previous studies have shown that the unrealistic body images portrayed as ideal by the media causes individuals to develop negative body images which eventually results into depression, low self-esteem and eating disorders. The study was conducted at Kirinyaga University College where a total of 251 students were randomly sampled to participate in the cross-sectional survey. A self-administered questionnaire and structured interview questions were used to collect data concerning media influence, body image perception and its influence on the individual body dis/satisfaction and impact on self-esteem. Data was coded and analyzed by Statistical package for social science (SPSS Version 21). 83% of the respondents observed that media portray a thin slender body image as attractive. 25% considered themselves very thin (American size portrayed by the media as beautiful and attractive), 52% considered themselves thin while 22% considered themselves curvy (size 8 figure). Only 1% of the respondents observed that they are fat and 0% obese. 75% were satisfied with their body image at while 25% were not happy with how they looked. Respondents that are not satisfied with their body appearance tend to develop negative body image which eventually affects their self-esteem and promotes eating disorders. The study highlights the need to develop measures to promote holistic healthy food choices and physical exercise to encourage individuals to appreciate their body image and adopt a healthy lifestyle. The study recommends that models of all body shapes and size be used by the media and other advertising companies to promote positive body image amongst their consumers.