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Abstract

This study examined university students’ perception of their body appearance in relation to media portrayal of ‘ideal body image’. Students spend time on social and mainstream media where they observe, like and share the images portrayed as ideal by the media. The unrealistic body images portrayed as ‘ideal’, lead to actions which results in depression, low self-esteem and eating disorder. The study was conducted in four universities, namely; University of Eldoret, Kirinyaga University, Egerton University and St. Paul’s University, Kenya. A total of 528 study respondents, was randomly selected to participate in the study. Self-administered questionnaire were used to collect data concerning media influence, body image perception and its influence on the individual body dis/satisfaction and self-esteem. Data was coded and analyzed by Statistical package for Social Science (SPSS Version 21). 68.4% of respondents were depressed when they did not perceive themselves fashionable according to media perceptions of ideal body image but there was a significant difference in relation to students’ perception towards their body weight, at \( p<0.05 \) level of significance. Majority of the students sampled were not comfortable with their body appearance and were psychologically affected by people’s judgment of their body appearance. Media and peer pressure were major influencing factors in students’ choice of clothing. It was evident that majority of the students had considered buying body weight loss products to achieve “ideal body image.” All the sampled students agreed that trying to achieve the ideal body image is unattainable and it affects their self-esteem and academic performance. There is need for the media to use women of different body sizes during fashion events and advertisements to demystify the “ideal body image” concept to promote positive thinking and create a sense of pride.

Keywords: University, Perception, Influence, Media Body Image, Clothing in Kenya.