The Role of Social Physique Anxiety on Exercise Participation Among the Nigerian Youth

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Abstract

Good health is an essential aspect of human well-being and overall lifestyle. Attention must be given to actions capable of maintaining good health and well-being. Thus, participating in regular exercise is an integral aspect of health-promoting behavior. However, it is observed that despite the health benefits associated with exercise participation, most individuals still live a sedentary lifestyle, especially the youth. The primary purpose of this study was to investigate the role of social physique anxiety (SPA) on exercise participation among Nigerian youth. One hundred and twenty-eight youths randomly selected from tertiary institutions in Kogi State, Nigeria, participated in the study. The participants completed a self-report measure assessing SPA and participation in exercise. A simple regression model was adopted to test the primary assumption of the study. The result of the investigation revealed a positive interaction between SPA and physical activity. Thus, the study concludes that social physique anxiety is an essential determinant of exercise participation among the youth.
Smedegaard et al., 2016). World Health Organization (WHO) contends that regular physical activities significantly contribute to the mitigation of certain non-communicable diseases, including hypertension, overweight, and obesity. It is linked to enhanced mental health, postpone the onset of dementia, and improved quality of life and well-being (WHO, 2018). Some researchers have highlighted the recommendations of WHO relating to the required guideline for adult participation in regular physical exercise (Bull et al., 2020; Okely et al., 2021).

Conversely, despite the benefits accredited to regular physical activity, it is observed that most people within the youth stage do not regularly engage in physical exercise, thereby leading to a much-reported decline in health and wellness. There is enough evidence that sedentary lifestyle is one of the significant health problems worldwide (Uchôa et al., 2019). The World Health Organization identified physical inactivity as the fourth leading risk factor for global mortality, accounting for 6% of all deaths globally in its report of 2010 (WHO, 2010). Sedentary behavior has been linked to many chronic diseases, including mental comorbidities, systemic hypertension, metabolic dysregulation, cancer, coronary heart disease, type 2 diabetes, breast and colon cancers, and shortened life expectancy (De Rezende et al., 2015; Kim, 2020; La Vecchia et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2012).

Several factors have been reported as predictor variables in regular exercise engagement in Nigeria. These include certain demographic variables and perceived personal, social, and environmental factors (Adegoke & Oyeyemi, 2011; Anjali & Sabharwal, 2018; Awotidebe et al., 2014). However, the present study is concerned with social physique anxiety as an antecedent of exercise participation among the youth.

Exercise is predominantly a domain that is inherently social and evaluative (Sabiston et al., 2014). Consequently, body physique and functionality are given greater attention. Thus, the domain of exercise engagement fosters a great deal of positive and negative emotional experiences. The concept of social physique anxiety (SPA) has been widely associated with exercise behavior (Crawford & Eklund, 2016; Eklund & Bianco, 2000; Ersoz, 2016; Haase et al., 2007; Sicilia et al., 2014). Social physique anxiety refers to the subjective affective state that reflects concern about how others are evaluating one’s body. SPA may be an essential predictor of physical activity because it may affect exercise cognitions, attitudes, and behaviors (Hauserblaus et al., 2004). Research indicates that people who strongly identify themselves as exercisers and endorse an increased SPA level may be at risk for developing exercise dependence (Cook et al., 2015).

Anxiety means worry, apprehension, or feeling uneasy. Social physique anxiety is a special kind of anxiety that reflects the uneasiness experienced when a person believes that others are evaluating and judging their body, especially in a social situation such as exercising. People experience social physique anxiety when working out at a fitness center, wearing a swimsuit on the beach, or even standing up in front of a group giving a presentation. Young people, including adolescents and even children, tend to be more anxious about their bodybuilding and appearance than older adults. Evidence abounds that suggest that people with SPA problems tend to have body shape and size dissatisfaction, problematic eating behavior, and a stronger desire to avoid exercising in public. Thus, this study aims to investigate the variation in regular exercise participation among Nigerian youth based on SPA. Accordingly, the study hypothesized that social physique anxiety would predict regular exercise among Nigerian youth

**Method:**
The study was conducted in Kogi State, Nigeria, between July and September 2021. The participants included males and females within the age range of 20-40 years, considered the youth age. The participants were mainly recruited from public tertiary institutions in the Kogi state. The participants were approached with the assistance of departmental leaders and research assistants and asked to participate in the study. However, the purpose of the study was explained to them, and they were equally informed that participation in the survey is voluntary. In the end, only those who consented were given the study questionnaire. In all, 136 questionnaires were distributed, and in return, 128 was received. Thus, the remaining eight copies were wrongly filled. Consequently, the one hundred and twenty-eight (128) correctly filled questionnaires was used for the study.

**Measure:**
Exercise engagement was measured using a developed Personal Exercise Engagement Scale. The 10-item scale was designed to measure the overall attitudes of the youth toward regular exercise. The Likert-type scale was validated following a pilot study, and Cronbach alpha 0.78 reliability coefficient was obtained. A higher score indicates high exercise engagement.
SPA was assessed with the Social Physique Anxiety Scale (SPAS). The instrument consists of seven items (e.g., "I am sometimes annoyed because I think others are negatively judging my weight or physical fitness"). The scale is scored on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always). Higher scores are related to symptoms of social physique anxiety, except for Item 5, which is redacted inversely (e.g., "I feel comfortable about how others appraise my body"). Cronbach alpha 0.81 reliability coefficient was recorded for the scale. A higher score shows high social physique anxiety.

Result:-
A simple linear regression model was employed to test the central hypothesis of the study. The analysis conducted on the data established a positive correlation between the variables (SPA and exercise participation). Thus, SPA statistically predicted exercise participation among the youth at $F(1, 126) = 3.231$, $p > 0.00$. More so, the adjusted $R^2$ indicates that SPA accounted for the observed 63.2% of the variation in youth's exercise participation.

Table 1: Table showing the linear regression result on the effect of SPA on exercise participation among the youth.

| B          | LL     | UL     | SEB   | $\beta R^2$ | t      | Sig   |
|------------|--------|--------|-------|-------------|--------|-------|
| Constant   | 1.571.53 | 1.68 .056 | 35.34 .000 |
| SPA        | -.176  | -.375  | .019  | .098-.174   | -5.97  | .000  |

Note. SPA= Social Physique Anxiety; B = Unstandardized regression coefficient; CI = Confident Interval; LL = Lower Limit; UL = Upper Limit; SEB = Standardized error of the coefficient; $\beta$ = Standardized coefficient; $R^2$ = Coefficient of determination, $\Delta R^2$ = Adjusted $R^2$. *P > 0.000

Discussion:-
The current study aimed to determine the influence of social physique anxiety on exercise participation among a sample of Nigerian youth. The study was guided by a single assumption that SPA would significantly predict exercise participation among the youth. Based on this assumption, a simple linear regression analysis was performed on the data. Consequently, the outcome of the investigation revealed that the independent variable significantly predicted exercise participation among the samples. Based on the result, the central hypothesis of the study was affirmed. In other words, the study successfully provided a research direction implicating SPA as an essential determinant of exercise engagement. The study's finding is aligned with the previous results (Alpkaya, 2019; Cook et al., 2015), which correlated SPA with physical activities. SPA is a powerful psychological phenomenon that could significantly influence a person's motivation, attitude, interest, and behavior. Thus, this understanding explains to a large extent the study's outcome, in that the perception of a youth relating to the thought of others evaluation and assessment might be prohibiting most youth from participating in an exercise in the social context.

Meanwhile, SPA, on the other hand, might motivate some youth to engage in exercise. In this case, either to maintain physique or to show off. However, the central knowledge in this regard is that SPA is an essential variable in physical exercise.

Conclusion:-
The present study aimed to examine exercise participation based on social physique anxiety. Data for the study was collected from individuals within the youth stage of development who were assembled from public tertiary institutions in Kogi State, Nigeria. It was assumed that SPA would determine exercise participation among the samples. Hence, the result of the regression model deployed to test the hypothesis linked exercise participation with SPA. Thus, the study concludes that SPA is a positive predictor of exercise participation. Although the data collection was primarily self-reported, and the samples may not reflect a reliable criterion for generalization. The present study contributed to the exercise literature by identifying SPA as an essential variable in youth participation in exercise. The study recommends that future researchers endeavor to explore the mediating and moderating variables in the SPA-exercise participation relationship.
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