Attitude toward Selfie Taking and its Relation to Body Image and Narcissism in Medical Students

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ABSTRACT

Background: The recent and rapidly popularized social phenomenon of selfie taking has been showing an increasing trend. It is thus imperative to assess the knowledge, attitude, and perception of the groups toward this phenomenon. Selfie taking is associated with younger age groups and hence, we aimed to explore the attitudes toward selfie taking and its relation toward body image and narcissism in medical college students. Methodology: This was cross-sectional study and had two groups with Group A comprising 92 first year medical students and Group B including 103 postgraduate (PG) medical students from various specialties. They were interviewed in a single session using the scale of attitude toward selfie-taking questionnaire, Body Image Acceptance and Action Questionnaire (BIAAQ), and the narcissistic personality inventory. Scores obtained were computed using basic descriptive statistics and t-test where appropriate. Results: A strong positive favorable trend toward selfie taking was noticed among both groups (A = 56.5%, B = 45.6%). There was no difference in attitude between the two groups, or difference in the gender between those clicking their own selfies regularly within each group. BIAAQ reflected a significant difference among male subjects of the two groups with PG students was more concerned about body image (P = 0.001), whereas female subjects of both groups showed no such difference. The narcissism traits also showed a significant difference, only when males of both groups were compared again in favor of PG medical students (P = 0.022). Conclusion: This study revealed that selfie-taking is popular among medical students both in their undergraduate and PG period. Further research in diverse clinical and nonclinical populations is warranted to explore the relation between this phenomenon and body image acceptance or narcissistic traits.

Key words: Body image, medical students, narcissism, narcissistic, postgraduate, selfie, undergraduate

INTRODUCTION

The Oxford dictionary defines a “selfie” as a photograph that one has taken of oneself, generally clicked with a smartphone or a webcam and shared through social media,[1] This phenomenon has clearly become an international trend seen by articles and pictures posted...
in newspapers and social media being flooded with selfie photographs. The digital era has with easy access, social acceptance and no cost of clicking or posting selfies has further supported this behavior and phenomenon.²¹

Behavioral addictions are addictions to activities or processes such as gambling, eating, tanning, video-gaming, shopping (online or real), sexuality, internet surfing, and work as opposed to a "substance" like drugs or alcohol.²² The younger age group is most vulnerable to fall prey to any addiction when compared with adults.²³ With younger adults being a major chunk of mobile phone users, there is a high proportion of internet addiction and smartphone addiction reported in this population.²⁴

Excessive clicking and sharing selfies on various social networking sites have become a popular activity.²⁵ A study done in 252 ¹¹² standard students in the city of Mumbai revealed that 42.6% regularly clicked selfies of themselves while 18.1% of girls and 15.2% of boys on an average clicked more than four selfies a day. Girls also scored higher on body image and narcissism scores than boys.²⁶

There is a need to study the phenomenon of selfie taking in diverse clinical and non-clinical populations. Hence, we aimed to study the attitude toward selfies, body image acceptance and narcissism personality traits and gender differences in the same in medical undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate (PG) students in a medical college in Mumbai.

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in a medical college in Mumbai. Two groups were involved in the study. The first (Group A) were UG medical students (1st year) and the second group (Group B) were PG medical students of the same medical school. Permission was obtained from the Institutional Ethics Committee for the study. The students were explained the need for the study along with its aims and objectives and confidentiality and anonymity to the institution and participants were promised. Two authors were present during administration of the questionnaire (ED and PS), and hence that any queries pertinent to the scales could be addressed. All scales were administered in a group setting and in a single sitting. Written valid informed consent was obtained from all the participants.

Following the session, one of the authors (ED) conducted a psycho-educational session for on behavioral addictions, specifically selfie taking, the internet and smartphone addiction. The session was conducted after collecting the filled questionnaires so that the information disseminated in the session did not impact the responses given in the questionnaires. The only inclusion criteria were that every participant should own a smartphone with selfie mode facility. The exclusion criteria were the presence of major medical or psychiatric illness that would compromise the responses to the questionnaires and participation in the study.

Scales administered:

**Attitude toward selfie-taking questionnaire**
A self-designed semi-structured questionnaire targeted to assess the knowledge, attitude, and perception about selfie taking. These questions were framed by the authors and validated by three senior psychiatrists of the institution following which it was administered on a general population of forty students to tests the clarity of the questions framed. Questions that were unclear were reframed. The questionnaire contains 29 questions. It is available only in English so far.²⁶

**The Body Image Acceptance and Action Questionnaire**
This is a 29 item self-report scale, rated on a 7-point Likert scale. Responses range from 1 (never true) to 7 (always true). It has been designed to measure the extent to which an individual exhibits an accepting posture toward negative thoughts and feelings about his or her body shape and/or weight. The scale is internally consistent with a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.93 with good construct validity. Scores are significantly negatively correlated with well-established measures of theoretically related constructs such as body dissatisfaction, general eating pathology, bulimia, and general distress.²⁷

**The narcissistic personality inventory**
This is a scale used to measure individual differences in narcissism characteristics as described as per Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 3rd Edition. The ease of administration with limited choices for the 40-paired statements made it a favorable choice in the student population. Narcissistic personality inventory has exhibited adequate reliability; construct validity and internal consistency of 0.83. The scores range from 0 to 40, with higher scores reflecting higher narcissism.²⁸

The analysis was performed using basic descriptive statistics as well as computerized statistical software (GraphPad statistical software, by Graph Pad Inc.).

RESULTS

**Attitudes toward selfie taking**
Although 100 forms were collected on completion from the UG students, 92 forms were chosen for the final analysis as some of the questionnaires were
very often was voiced by 35.8% (n = 25) of the UG group and 12.6% (n = 13) from the PG group. Very often editing selfies using software was done by 19.6% (n = 18) of UGs and 25.2% (n = 26) of PGs of which 18.4% (n = 17) females were from UG group compared to 15.5% (n = 16) females of the PG group. Only one male of UG group compared to ten of PG group edited their selfies before posting. Group selfies were clicked by 25% (n = 23) UG and 8.7% (n = 9) PGs. An attempt to achieve a certain body type or look to gain more popularity for their selfies was reported by three females from the UG group and 5 from the PG group. The act of “sometimes” copying or imitating the selfies of famous celebrities was reported by 24.3% (n = 25) PG students and 20.6% (n = 19) UG students.

Forty-five percent (n = 41) of UGs and 67% (n = 69) of postgraduates stated that the people who click more selfies are insecure of themselves. Similarly, 60.8% (n = 56) of the UG group and 67.9% (n = 70) of the PG group felt that those who clicked more selfies are self-focused or self-involved. Nearly 14.1% (n = 13) of UGs had a fight with their partner or friend over taking too many selfies. Of them, all 13 respondents were males. Whereas, 16.5% (n = 17) of PGs responded positively, where only 14 were males. The act of “very often” checking the SNS for comments and likes was reported by 32.6% (n = 30) of UGs, with 77.8% (n = 28) of them being females. Among the PGs, it was only 5.8% (n = 6), of whom 3 were males and 3 females. The gender difference in each group was significant for UGs (P = 0.001), but not PGs (P = 0.904).

The dangerous act of often clicking selfies in risky public places (such as streets, public transportation, and moving vehicles when bored) was seen in 38% (n = 35) students of the UG group and 42.7% (n = 44) of the PG group. The difference among females in two groups was significant (P = 0.038), while that for boys was not significant (P = 0.180).

### Table 1: Average selfies per day and week amongst the groups

| Category          | UG group (n=92) | PG group (n=103) |
|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|                   | Male (Ma)=56    | Female (Fa)=36  | Male (Mb)=49 | Female (Fb)=54 |
| **Average selfies per day (%)** |                  |                  |               |               |
| 0-2               | 26 (46.4)       | 8 (22.2)        | 19 (38.7)    | 17 (31.5)     |
| 2-4               | 17 (30.4)       | 9 (25)          | 24 (49)      | 21 (38.9)     |
| >4                | 13 (23.2)       | 19 (52.8)       | 6 (12.3)     | 16 (29.6)     |
| **Average selfies per week (%)** |                  |                  |               |               |
| 0-5               | 25 (44.6)       | 10 (27.8)       | 20 (40.8)    | 18 (33.3)     |
| 5-10              | 15 (26.8)       | 10 (27.8)       | 19 (38.8)    | 17 (31.5)     |
| >10               | 16 (28.6)       | 16 (44.4)       | 10 (20.4)    | 19 (35.2)     |

Ma – Males UG group (undergraduate medical college 1st year); Mb – Males PG group (postgraduation enrolled medical college students); Fa – Females UG group (undergraduate medical college 1st year); Fb – Females PG group (postgraduation enrolled medical college students)
Most commonly, selfies were clicked at home (UG = 46.7%, PG = 43.6%) followed by college/work (UG = 36.9%, PG = 18.4%) and then public places like malls, roads, cinemas, etc., (UG = 16.3%, PG = 33.9%).

Body image acceptance questionnaire

The difference among females of both groups was not significant on body image scores (t = 0.31 df = 88, P = 0.760). However, males of both groups was significant (t = 3.37 df = 103, P = 0.001). Gender differences within the UG group was statistically significant (t = 2.63, df = 90, P = 0.01), whereas it was statistically not significant for the PG group (t = 0.20, df = 101, P = 0.843) [Table 2].

Narcissism scores

The difference among females of both groups was not significant (t = 1.74, df = 88, P = 0.086) whereas males of both groups showed a significant difference (t = 2.32, df = 103, P = 0.022). Gender difference among the UG groups was statistically not significant (t = 1.67, df = 90, P = 0.099) while gender differences among the PG group was statistically significant (t = 2.31, df = 101, P = 0.023) [Table 2].

DISCUSSION

The present study showed that selfies are a popular concept among the UG as well as the postgraduate students. A positive outlook was reflected in approval of others taking selfies as well as participants themselves regular clicking selfies. This was in concordance with a previous study conducted by the authors. Dangerous selfie taking was observed in a worrisome proportion of both groups. Older group students reported it than younger. Statistics have posited India as having the most selfie-related deaths in 2015 and this needs vigilance from a mental health standpoint.

A small share of individuals, more of who were males had fought with their partners/friends over excessive selfie taking. Similar trends have been reflected in a survey in Florida, done to observe jealousy amongst partners when their partner gets noticed for their selfies. Whereas another study showed that the social media use does not have a significant impact on relationships.

Body image reflects an individual’s thinking; feeling and behavior patterns toward his or her own physical attributes and revealed some interesting trends. The study showed more girls were dissatisfied than boys in the UG group. At the same time, a significantly higher score was seen in the body image acceptance of the PG males as compared to UGs. A study has revealed that people who were more satisfied with their body image posted more selfies to Instagram confidently showing off. A previous study on selfies and BIAAQ reflected more dissatisfaction among females than males.

Narcissistic traits were revealed to be more in males of the PG group. In a recent Ohio State University study men who posted more photos of themselves online scored higher in measures of narcissism and psychopathy. The study revealed that selfies are a popular concept, not only among the UGs, but also among the PG group.

The study was limited in the fact that students of just one medical college were included. A multicenter study would have yielded greater data which could then have been generalized to some extent in medical students. This is the first study on selfie taking behavior and attitudes toward selfie taking in medical students. This study would pave the way for future large-scale studies in diverse population of students to enhance knowledge of selfie taking behavior in the modern generation.

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