



Body Shaming and Self-Esteem: A Study Among First-Year Student

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ABSTRACT

Body shaming is a form of verbal bullying carried out by one individual against another. It can be understood as inappropriate and harmful actions or expressions directed at physical appearance, whether towards oneself or others. If persistent, it can erode self-confidence and affect an individual's self-esteem. This study aims to determine the relationship between body shaming and self-esteem among first-year students of the Faculty of Nursing at Universitas Sumatera Utara. This research employs a quantitative associative correlation method with a cross-sectional approach, involving 215 first-year students selected through total sampling techniques. The research instrument used was a questionnaire. The results, analyzed using the Spearman rank test, indicated a p-value of 0.000 (<0.05), signifying a significant relationship between body shaming and self-esteem among first-year students of the Faculty of Nursing at Universitas Sumatera Utara. The findings revealed that body shaming was at a moderate level among 163 first-year students (75.8%), while self-esteem was also at a moderate level among 165 first-year students (76.7%). It is recommended that first-year students cultivate gratitude for their body shape, view themselves positively, and offer positive affirmations to themselves and others.

Keywords: Body shaming, Self-esteem, Adolescents

ABSTRAK

Body shaming merupakan *bullying verbal* yang dilakukan individu kepada individu lainnya, dapat diartikan sebagai tindakan atau ekspresi yang tidak pantas dan merugikan terhadap penampilan fisik, baik terhadap diri sendiri maupun orang lain, dimana jika terjadi terus menerus dapat mengikis kepercayaan diri dapat mempengaruhi harga diri seseorang. Tujuan penelitian ini untuk melihat hubungan *body shaming* dengan harga diri mahasiswa tingkat awal Fakultas Keperawatan Universitas Sumatera Utara. Penelitian ini menggunakan korelasi kuantitatif asosiatif dengan pendekatan *cross sectional* dengan jumlah sampel sebanyak 215 mahasiswa tingkat awal dengan teknik *total sampling*. Instrumen penelitian ini menggunakan lembar kuesioner. Hasil penelitian menggunakan uji *spearman rank* mendapatkan hasil *p value* = 0,000(<0,05) yang artinya terdapat hubungan antara *body shaming* dengan harga diri mahasiswa tingkat awal Fakultas Keperawatan Universitas Sumatera Utara. Hasil yang didapatkan bahwa *body shaming* berada pada tingkat sedang sebanyak 163 mahasiswa tingkat awal (75,8%) dan pada harga diri pada tingkat sedang sebanyak 165 mahasiswa tingkat awal (76,7%). Diharapkan mahasiswa tingkat awal dapat meningkatkan rasa syukur terhadap bentuk tubuh, melihat diri sendiri secara positif, dan memberikan kalimat positif terhadap diri sendiri dan orang lain.

Kata Kunci: *Body Shaming*, Harga Diri, Remaja



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1. INTRODUCTION

Body shaming is verbal bullying by individuals to other individuals, where a body shaming perpetrator can also be the object of body shaming and turn into a victim of similar behavior (S. Lestari, 2019). Body shaming is a negative comment on someone's physical appearance, as height, weight, skin color, and hair shape. These judgments can affect how adolescents think (Fauzia & Rahmijati, 2019). Body shaming is defined as inappropriate and harmful actions or expressions towards physical appearance, both towards oneself and others. Body shaming is closely related to body image, which is the way a person views their own body. This can cause the body to have a negative perception and dissatisfaction (Novitasari & Hamid, 2021). Everyone experiences body shaming in different ways. Round, fat, slim, teptos, spotty, black, pole, and other words that describe bad comments.

Body shaming is always related to denouncing the size, shape, weight, and color of the skin. Forms of body shaming behavior include body shape, skin color, hair/body hair, how to speak, and the interaction between speech and action (Rachmah & Baharuddin, 2019). According to Dewi et al (in Khasanah & Mamnuah, 2021), adolescence is a period when individuals experience psychological development and identification patterns from childhood to adulthood. WHO says adolescents have an age range between 10 and 24 years (Ragita & Fardana N., 2021). Adolescence is a period of self-development to create self-identity. Aspects of adolescent development consist of physical, psychosocial, cognitive, moral, and spiritual development. Physical and hormonal changes that occur during puberty will have an impact on the body shape, weight, and appearance of adolescents. In addition, adolescents pay more attention to how they look in the eyes of others (Novitasari & Hamid, 2021).

According to Castro et al. (in Siagian & Niman, 2022), self-esteem is an evaluation of oneself and others. This evaluation shapes positive or negative feelings about adolescents' self-worth. Individuals with low self-esteem tend to lack confidence in overcoming problems, prefer to gather information before making decisions, have ineffective coping strategies, and are more vulnerable to mental health issues such as depression (Novitasari & Hamid, 2021). Adolescents who struggle with poor self-acceptance often find it difficult to control and regulate their emotions. They need strong resilience to recover from tough times and to ignore verbal bullying so it does not harm their mental health (Ekayamti & Lukitaningtyas, 2022).

According to KPAI data (2018), there were 161 cases of bullying out of a total of 455 cases in the school environment. Of these, 41 cases involved aggressive children as bullies, while around 228 incidents involved bullying and violence. The rest involved students who were bullied and children who were victims of policies (Fauzia & Rahmijati, 2019). In addition, the Child Protection Commission also found 37,381 aggressive acts against children in nine years, from 2011 to 2019. Bullying practices have also increased in schools and on social media, with 2,473 documented cases this year (Ekayamti & Lukitaningtyas, 2022).

Body shaming is a negative and inappropriate action or comment directed at a person's physical appearance, including oneself or others. Body shaming by peers can put adolescents in distress and excessive worry about their body size and appearance (Novitasari & Hamid, 2021). Everyone experiences body shaming in different ways. Round, fat, slim, spotty, black, pole, and other words that describe bad comments. Body shaming usually denounces size, shape, weight, and skin color. Body shaming has several forms of treatment, including fat shaming, skinny shaming, hair/body hair, skin color, speech, and a combination of

speech and action (Rachmah & Baharuddin, 2019). According to Lestari (2020), several reasons why in adolescents, body shaming often occurs due to differences between individual appearance and beauty standards accepted by society. However, many see it as commonplace, without realizing the negative impact that can be experienced by the victim. The perpetrators are also often unaware of how detrimental body shaming can be. Body shaming causes the victim to feel offended and even hurt, which can affect the mental health of the victim. Body shaming that is received continuously will have an impact on the victim's mentality. The impact felt by victims can feel insecure and isolate themselves, and this right can affect the mentality of victims of body shaming (Rachmah & Baharuddin, 2019). Body shaming that is done repeatedly makes a person have a new personality and eliminates their original personality. This can lead to low body shape acceptance because they live to meet society's standards, so they cannot be themselves (Dacosta et al., 2023).

Although several studies have examined the relationship between body shaming and self-esteem among adolescents and social media users, there is limited research focusing on university students, particularly those in the field of nursing. Nursing students, especially at the early level of study, face unique challenges compared to other student populations. They are required to develop professional identity, maintain a presentable appearance during clinical practice, and often experience higher self-awareness regarding physical image due to the nature of their future profession, which emphasizes hygiene, empathy, and professionalism. These expectations can intensify the psychological impact of body shaming and make them more vulnerable to self-esteem issues. Furthermore, early-level nursing students are in a transitional stage from adolescence to young adulthood. They are adapting to academic and social demands of university life while forming their professional and personal identity. This makes them an important yet understudied group for understanding how body shaming experiences affect self-esteem development.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to examine the relationship between body shaming and self-esteem among early-level students of the Nursing Faculty at the University of North Sumatra (USU). The findings are expected to provide insight into the psychological well-being of nursing students and contribute to developing preventive or educational interventions within academic environments. This study aims to see if there is a relationship between body shaming and the self-esteem of early-level students of the nursing faculty of the University of North Sumatra.

2. METHODS

This study uses associative quantitative correlation with a cross-sectional approach with a sample size of 215 undergraduates with a total sampling technique. This research instrument uses a body shaming questionnaire sheet to assess body shaming and an RSES (Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale) questionnaire to assess self-esteem. The validity test on the questionnaire used the construct validity test with a value of 4.0, and the reliability value on the questionnaire was 0.702 and 0.806. The correlation test in this study used Spearman's rank test.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Result

Based on Table 1, the results of research conducted on 215 students of the Faculty of Nursing, University of North Sumatra. In the data collected, early level students are generally 19 years old, with as many as 101 early level students (47%). The gender of early level students is generally female as many as

200 early level students (93%).

Table 1. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Characteristics in First Year Students of the Faculty of Nursing, University of North Sumatra (n=215)

Characteristics	Frekuensi (f)	Persentase (%)
Gender		
Male	15	7
Female	200	93
Age		
17 Years	4	1,9
18 Years	100	46,5
19 Years	101	46
20 Years	9	4,2
21 Years	1	0,5
Faculty		
Nursing	215	100
Semesters		
Semesters 2	215	100

Based on Table 2, the frequency results on the experience of body shaming are mostly moderate, 163 undergraduates (75.8%), and the results of self-esteem are mostly moderate, 165 undergraduates (76.7%).

Table 2. Results of the Frequency Distribution of Body Shaming and Self-Esteem of First-Year Students of the Faculty of Nursing (n=215)

Category	Intervals	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
High	17-40	2	0,9%
Medium	41-63	163	75,8%
Low	64-85	50	23,3%
Total		215	100%

Category	Intervals	Frequency(f)	Percentage (%)
High	31-40	47	21,9%
Medium	21-30	165	76,7%
Low	10-20	3	1,4%
Total		215	100%

Based on Table 3, the correlation value of $-.434$ indicates a significant relationship between body shaming and student self-esteem, based on the results of the correlation test above, which resulted in a significant value of $0.000 < 0.05$. The relationship between body shaming and self-esteem is quite large, with moderate strength and a negative direction. The higher the body shaming treatment a person receives, the lower their self-esteem.

Table .3: Spearman's Test Result

Variable	R	p-value	Information
<i>Body shaming</i> <i>Self Esteem</i>	-0,434	0,000	Sufficient strength with a negative relationship

3.2 Discussion

This study obtained the results of body shaming treatment received by undergraduates at the Faculty of Nursing, University of North Sumatra. The majority of students experienced body shaming treatment at

a moderate level of 163 undergraduates (75.8%). The results of this study found that the body shaming treatment of early-level students of the Faculty of Nursing, University of North Sumatra, was in the moderate category of 163 early-level students (75.8%). This is in line with the research of Putri et al (2024). The dominant type of body shaming experienced by students is moderate body shaming. The largest age group among all undergraduates is adolescents.

Teenagers experience significant physical changes, such as body growth, body shape changes, and skin color changes. They are more vulnerable to comments and criticism about their physical appearance, which can be in the form of body shaming. Adults usually have a wider and more stable experience in life, so they are less affected by external influences and are better able to deal with criticism and comments. They are also better able to distinguish between balanced and unbalanced comments, so they are less vulnerable to body shaming (Fauzia & Rahmijati, 2019). This is especially true for adolescents who are easily influenced by the latest trends and developments, which can be one of the factors that lead adolescents to often become victims of body shaming (Munada, 2023).

Women are also reported to have twice the risk of having at least one lifetime experience of body shaming related to weight compared to men, which may be related to sociocultural factors, such as the widespread influence of the thin ideal in feminine beauty standards (Emmer et al., 2020). In line with this study, the results obtained based on gender, the majority of undergraduates are female, as many as 200 undergraduates (93%). In line with the research of Hidayat et al (2019) that most of the undergraduates were female, 66 undergraduates (64.1%), while the remaining 37 undergraduates (35.9%) were male. Gender can affect the results of the study because gender is one of the factors that can influence body-shaming behavior. Women more often get body shaming treatment because women are more easily offended than men, women are more concerned about how to cope with the body changes they experience, and how they look different from adolescents. Men who don't really think about how they look (Hidayat et al., 2019).

In this study, the majority of early level students were at a moderate level of self-esteem, 165 early level students (76.7%). Moderate self-esteem in individuals means that someone has self-esteem between high self-esteem and low self-esteem. According to Coopersmith (Adam & Alwi, 2023), the difference from individuals who have moderate self-esteem is in the level of self-confidence, social acceptance of their environment, and how a person assesses themselves. Self-esteem is related to self-acceptance. Self-acceptance comes from an objective assessment of strengths and weaknesses in certain situations (Hikmawati et al., 2023).

Based on research conducted by Nasution & Simanjuntak (2020), the results show that the effect of body shaming on reducing students' self-esteem levels is relatively small. Nonetheless, it is important not to ignore the role of body shaming in lowering students' self-esteem levels. When a person develops a very negative view of their body, they tend to become distracted and depressed by their physical appearance. Self-esteem is an individual's perception of themselves and how others perceive them. These perceptions about different aspects of adolescents' lives can influence positive or negative feelings towards their self-esteem. (Ekayamti & Lukitaningtyas, 2022).

Based on this study, the results of Spearman's rank statistical test obtained a value of $r = (-.434)$, which means the level of strength is sufficient and shows a negative direction, namely, the greater the x variable, the lower the y variable. The p-value result of this study is $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.05$), which means

that there is a significant relationship between body shaming and the self-esteem of early level students. So that the hypothesis in this study can answer the H_a hypothesis, which means that there is a relationship between body shaming and self-esteem in early level students of the Faculty of Nursing, University of North Sumatra. The results of this study found that early level students who experienced high body shaming treatment mostly had low self-esteem. Whereas the early level students who experienced low body shaming treatment mostly had high self-esteem.

The results of this study indicate a moderate negative correlation between body shaming and self-esteem among nursing students ($r = -0.434$), meaning that greater exposure to body shaming is associated with lower levels of self-esteem. Recent research has emphasized that body-related criticism and weight stigma can have harmful emotional effects, including increasing feelings of shame and self-criticism that undermine one's sense of self-worth (Puhl et al., 2020; Alberga et al., 2021). Studies among university students similarly show that frequent appearance-related comments and social comparison reinforce negative body perceptions, leading to decreased self-esteem (Betz & Sabik, 2020; Kaur et al., 2021). Moreover, recent evidence suggests that internalized body shame functions as a key psychological mechanism linking external shaming experiences to lower self-esteem and emotional distress (Matos et al., 2022). In the specific context of nursing education, where students are expected to maintain self-confidence in clinical interactions, reduced self-esteem may impede communication, professional identity development, and clinical performance. Therefore, the negative association found in this study highlights the importance of creating supportive academic environments that discourage body shaming and promote positive body image among nursing students.

This is in line with the research of Ekayamti & Lukitaningtyas (2022). Teenagers who experience body shaming tend to experience decreased self-acceptance and self-confidence. Research shows a significant relationship between verbal bullying and self-esteem. The results obtained were seen in this study, where 50 undergraduates (23.3%) of the students experienced low body shaming, while 47 undergraduates (21.9%) had low self-esteem. Positive self-acceptance is important for adolescents as it can increase their sense of comfort, confidence, and feeling that they are worthy of being valued. Good self-acceptance also plays an important role in improving one's self-esteem. (Ekayamti & Lukitaningtyas, 2022). The researcher assumes that the results of this study show that most of the undergraduates have a fairly good self-acceptance, because the majority of them show a moderate level of self-esteem. It can be concluded that the majority of students have good self-acceptance, and students tend not to think about negative comments received.

4. Conclusion

Based on the results of this study, there is a significant relationship between body shaming and the self-esteem of early level students with sufficient strength and shows a negative direction, namely, the greater the x variable, the lower the y variable. So that the hypothesis in this study can answer the H_a hypothesis, which means that there is a relationship between body shaming and self-esteem in early level students of the Faculty of Nursing, University of North Sumatra.\

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