

## **Body image, subjective happiness and eating attitudes among 19 to 63 years-old Turkish women**

Türk kadınlarda (19-63 yaş) beden imajı, öznel mutluluk ve yeme tutumları

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### **Abstract**

The aim of this research is to investigate body image, subjective happiness and eating attitudes of women of different ages. The research group consists of 161 women. The age range of the research group is 19-63. In the study, Body Image Scale, Subjective Happiness Scale and Eating Attitude Test were used in order to collect data. ANOVA, Scheffe, the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient method and multiple regression analysis method were adopted to analyze the data. According to the findings, a significant difference was identified between age groups of the participants and their subjective happiness. The results also indicated that there are considerable positive relationship between age and subjective happiness and, subjective happiness and body image. In addition, the findings indicate that age, body image and eating attitude are significant predictors of women's subjective happiness.

**Keywords:** Body image, age, subjective happiness, eating attitudes

### **Özet**

Bu araştırmanın amacı, farklı yaşlardaki kadınların beden imajını, öznel mutluluğunu ve yeme tutumlarını incelemektir. Araştırma grubu 161 kadından oluşmaktadır. Araştırma grubunun yaş aralığı 19-63 dür. Araştırmada verilerin toplanması için Beden İmaj Ölçeği, Öznel Mutluluk Ölçeği ve Yeme Tutum Testi kullanılmıştır. Verilerin analizinde ANOVA, Scheffe, Pearson Momentler Çarpımı Korelasyon Katsayısı tekniği ve çoklu regresyon analizi tekniği kullanılmıştır. Bulgulara göre, farklı yaş gruplarındaki katılımcıların öznel mutlulukları arasında anlamlı bir fark tespit edilmiştir. Sonuçlar yaş ve öznel mutluluk ile öznel mutluluk ve beden imajı arasında anlamlı pozitif ilişkiler olduğunu göstermiştir. Diğer yandan bulgular yaş, beden imgesi ve yeme tutumunun kadınların öznel mutluluğunun anlamlı yordayıcıları olduğunu göstermektedir.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Beden imajı, yaş, öznel Mutluluk, yeme tutumları

### **Introduction**

Today's visual culture and cultural stereotypes cause an anxiety concerning physical attractiveness among adolescents and young adults (Thompson & Smolak, 2001) and this situation has become an important problem particularly among young women regarding body image. Body image is a multidimensional description of an individual's ideas and feelings about body satisfaction, body value and his/her physical condition (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002; Thompson & van den Berg, 2002).

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Physical appearance constitutes a significant aspect of an individual's self-perception (Dittmar, Halliwell, & Ive, 2006).

Researches on body image were mostly done on adolescents and young adults nevertheless, show an increase in aged populations. In older ages, as in weight and skin, body changes affect body-image continuum and this situation emerges as a problem (Tunaley, Walsh, & Nicolson, 1999; Whitbourne & Skultety, 2002). With the increasing age, woman body undergoes some transformations such as wrinkles, hair loss or thinning and increase in weight and fat tissue (Clarke & Griffin, 2008). Despite the fact that body image develops over the course of a lifetime, less information is available about body image dissatisfaction in older women. Therefore, it is possible to talk about a life-long concern for women in terms of physical appearance. On the other hand, the body dissatisfaction of older women seems more likely, whereas, today's ideal body fact has associated to youth and slimness (Davalos, Davalos, & Layton, 2007; Lewis, Medvedev, & Seponski, 2011).

It is often mentioned that women's body satisfaction is associated with their overall satisfaction about life (Diener, Wolsic, & Fujita, 1995; Katz & Farrow, 2000). In this context, in their research on young, middle-aged and old women, Stokes & Frederick-Recascino (2003) found that body image is a significant precursor of women's happiness in each age group. Donaghue (2009) found that age and body satisfaction is an important precursor of life satisfaction. Swami et al. (2015) found that body appreciation in women positively predicted subjective happiness.

In developed countries and in societies under the influence of the Western culture; concern over body size, weight, and visual image draws attention. This concern often continues with the unstable relationship with food. Unstable relationship can be seen easily by observing increasing number of diet clinics and dietary recommendations on newspapers, magazines and TV broadcasts and weight control medication in the drugstores. Aesthetic concerns, operations, exercises that starting with a simple diet, may be the beginning of an endless road (Yücel, 2009). Today, given the increase in value for physical attractiveness and appearance, women are dragged mainly to struggle for existence with their body size and appearance and consequently women pay the price for some psychological discomforts. Evidence is accumulating that repeated exposure to media and to both direct and indirect (via media's effects on peers, parents, coaches, physicians, etc.) pressures from media to be thin constitute risk factors for body dissatisfaction, concerns over weight and disordered eating behaviors in adolescent girls and young women (Lopez-Guimera, Levine, Sanchez-Carracedo & Fauquet, 2010). In a study performed over 3400 women and 500 men participants between the ages of 13 and 90, weight gain constitutes the primary reason of negative impact on body image in women and men. This result ensues, although, the majority of the participants of the study of normal weight (Yücel, 2009). Eating disorder is a mental illness, which the struggle of the individual with his/her body can be overtly observed. Most studies dealing with eating disorder and body image focus on adolescent and young women. However, recent studies indicated that eating disorder is also common among middle-aged and older women (Smolak, 2006; Gagne et al., 2012). On the other hand, body dissatisfaction and eating disorder are considered risk factors for depression (Shepherd & Ricciardelli, 1998; Polivy & Herman, 2002; Ferreira, Seoane, & Senra 2011). In terms of eating disorder, it is indicated that a significant number of middle-aged and older women have chronic diet problem (Heatherston et al., 1997; Allaz et al., 1998).

Studies, related to body image of women from different countries and in different races and ages, as well, are available in the literature. There are studies indicating racial differences related to body image satisfaction (Harris, 1994; Molloy & Herzberger, 1998), whilst opposing studies

indicating nonexistence of such difference (Roberts, Cash, Feingoldi, & Johnson, 2006). On the other hand, in accordance with the existing literature, old age for women is considered as one of the fundamental factors for body dissatisfaction. However, some research findings point out different results. These controversial results revealed the need to investigate the body image of Turkish women. Nonetheless, in United States and Europe, there are several studies concerning changes of women's perception towards body image (Hudson et al., 2007; Preti et al., 2009; Runfola et al., 2013) but no such study was found in Turkey. The research is expected to contribute the evaluation of body image of women in Turkey. Depending upon all aforementioned facts, the study aims to answer these questions:

1. Do body images, subjective happiness and eating attitudes of women, change according to their ages?
2. Is there a significant relationship between women's age, body images, subjective happiness and eating attitudes?
3. Do women's age, body images and eating attitudes predict their subjective happiness?

## **Method**

### ***Participants***

The research group consists of 161 women in three different age ranges (19-34, 35-49 and 50 and above). The first (19-34), second (35-49) and the third (50 and above) group consists of 53 (32.91%) 51 (31.67%) and 57 (35.40%) individuals, respectively. The age range of the research group is 19-63. Women were classified as in young (19-34), middle-aged (35-49) and older (50 and above) adulthood stages. Women participants of the study are all graduates of high school or college and work in different public institutions and private corporations.

### ***Procedure***

Data were obtained from female employees in different public and private institutions living in Trabzon, Turkey, in 2015. Researchers collected data and women were conceived to be volunteered. Implementation of measurement tools took about 20 minutes and measurement tools have been applied to all women in the same order.

### ***Measures***

***Body Perception Scale:*** In order to determine body perceptions (images) of participants Body Perception Scale was employed. The scale was developed by Secord and Jourard (1953) and adopted to Turkish by Hovardaoğlu (1993). This scale consists of 40 articles which refer to each of organs or their functions. Hovardaoğlu (1993) found Cronbach Alpha coefficient of the scale as 0.91, looked its correlation with State-Trait Anxiety Inventory for the validity of the scale and then found it as 0.39 and 0.89. Each article of the scale was graded on a five point Likert scale. On the scale, the grading is the following: "1= I like it very much" and "5= I don't like it at all". Higher points indicate dissatisfaction in body perception.

***Subjective Happiness Scale:*** In order to measure happiness levels of individuals, the study employed "Subjective Happiness Scale", which was developed by Lyubomirsky & Lepper (1999). The scale consists of 4 articles. It is a tool of measurement used for measuring general happiness

that individuals feel. It aims to evaluate general happiness. The points that can be obtained from the scale vary between 4 and 20 and high points indicate higher level of happiness. Lyubomirsky & Lepper (1999) indicated that that, although "Subjective Happiness Scale" short, it fulfils psychometric criteria of measurement. Validity and credibility study of Turkish version of "Subjective Happiness Scale" was done by Akin & Satici (2011). On order to confirm original structure for structure validity, DFA was applied. Goodness of fit index values indicated that single dimensional subjective happiness model is valid. Factor loads of articles range between 0.34 and 0.84. In credibility analyses of Subjective Happiness Scale, Cronbach Alpha internal consistency credibility coefficient was found 0.86. Subsistence analysis correlations of the scale was listed between 0.55 and 0.76 (Akin & Satici, 2011).

*Eating Attitude Test:* It was developed by Garner & Garfinkel (1979) in order to measure anorexia nervosa patients' behaviours and attitudes towards eating and possible eating disorders in normal individuals. It is a likert type scale consisting of 40 articles. It is applied to young individuals and adults. The level of total points is directly related to psychopathologic level. In other words, EAT can identify individuals, who can be regarded as "patients". It can also identify an individual's inclination to this disorder. In studies of EAT, 7% of individuals, who got more than 30 points are normal whereas the others have eating attitude disorder. The scale consists of 40 articles and the answers are marked in a six point likert scale. The answers vary between "always and never". Grading is done according to the pathological extremes and points vary between 0 and 3. The questions 1, 18, 19, 23,27 and 39 of the scale, the options "sometimes" is 1, "rarely" is 2 and "never" is 3 points; participants get 0 points for other options. For other questions on the scale, the grading is the following: 3 points for "always", 2 points for "very often" and 1 point for "often". Participants get 0 points for other options. The total points are calculated by adding all points. In the original form of the scale, break point is determined as 30 points (Öner, 1997). Break point of the scale is 30+. The points between 30 and 32 are considered as sub-pathological group points. This range indicates individuals who are differentiated from general population in terms of eating attitudes but do not indicate diagnostic eating disorder symptoms. 33 points and above indicate pathological eating symptoms. Validity and credibility studies were done by Savaşır & Erol in 1989. Test-retest credibility was found 0.65 and Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficient was calculated 0.70. Its validity was found 0.87 (Savaşır & Erol 1989).

### ***Data Analysis***

The researcher informed participating women, who are high school and college graduates and work in various institutions, that tools of measurement and Personal Information Form were used for a scientific study in order to collect data. In analyzing data, SPSS 16.0 software was used; ANOVA, Scheffe, the Pearson product moment correlation and multiple regression analysis technique were employed.

### **Results**

The research firstly employed ANOVA technique in order to evaluate whether body images, subjective happiness and eating attitudes of women change according to age or not. The results were shown on Table 1.

**Table 1.** The Differences of Body Images, Subjective Happiness and Eating Attitudes by Age Variable.

	Source of variance	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p
Subjective happiness	Between groups	88.08	2	44.04	5.02	.008*
	Within groups	1385.19	158	8.76		
	Total	1473.28	160			
Body image	Between groups	347	2	173.72	.48	.617
	Within groups	56752.76	158	359.19		
	Total	57100.21	160			
Eating attitudes	Between groups	2392.06	2	1196.03	2.86	.06
	Within groups	65936.11	158	417.31		
	Total	68328.17	160			

\*p < 0.01

The analysis results indicated that there is a significant relationship between participants' ages and their subjective happiness (F = 5.023, p < 0.01). In order to identify the source of this significant difference, Scheffe test was applied. Accordingly, in terms of subjective happiness levels, subjective happiness levels of women who are 50 and over were found ( $\bar{x}$  = 18.42) which is higher than 19-34 year-group ( $\bar{x}$  = 16.84) and 35-49 year-group ( $\bar{x}$  = 16.90).

Secondly, the study observed the significant relationship between women's age, body images, subjective happiness and eating attitudes and Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient method was used. The results were shown on Table 2.

**Table 2.** Relationship Between Age, Subjective Happiness and Eating Attitudes

	1	2	3	4
1. Age	1	.217**	.057	-.162*
2. Subjective happiness		1	.301**	-.184*
3. Body image			1	.123
4. Eating attitude				1

\*p < 0.05 \*\*p < 0.01

The analysis results indicated that there is a considerable positive relationship between age and subjective happiness (r = .217, p < 0.01), subjective happiness and body image (r = .301, p < 0.01); whereas no significant relationship between age and body image, body image and eating attitudes. Besides, a significant negative and low-level relationship between age and eating attitudes (r = -.162, p < 0.05), subjective happiness and eating attitude (r = -.184, p < 0.05) was observed.

In the research it was finally observed whether the ages of women predict their body images, subjective happiness and eating attitudes or not; multiple regression analysis technique was employed. The results were shown on Table 3.

**Table 3.** Multiple Regression Analysis Concerning Prediction of Subjective Happiness

Variables	B	Std. Error	$\beta$	t	p	R	R <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta R^2$	F
(Constant)	13.73	2.52		5.44	.00	.41	.17	.15	10.53
Age	.61	.27	.16	2.26	.00				
Body Image	.05	.01	.31	4.29	.01				
Eating attitude	-.02	.01	-.19	-2.62	.02				

According to analysis results, age ( $\beta=.16$ ), body image ( $\beta=.31$ ) and eating attitude ( $\beta=-.19$ ), were identified as significant precursors of subjective happiness ( $F=10.53$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Nevertheless, it was determined that the model explains 17% of total variance with regard to subjective happiness.

### Discussion

This research mainly aimed to investigate differences between body images, subjective happiness and eating attitudes of Turkish women according to their ages. Research findings demonstrated that subjective happiness of women varies significantly according to age. Subjective happiness of women who are 50 and above was found higher than the women were whose ages between 19 and 34 and 35 and 49. Similarly, Stokes, & Frederick-Recascino (2003) in their study found out that happiness levels of older women were higher than young and middle-age women. This situation may stem from the fact that older women pay less attention to details and they are capable of handling anxiety more easily (Tiggemann, 2004). As the advancing age brings fewer responsibilities of life, more time and more opportunities for personal desires, increasing experience on problem solving and development of common sense concerning life, older women might use these as sources of their subjective happiness.

The study identified that body images of women do not change according to their ages. In accordance with the body image points of the participants, women have anxieties concerning body image. However, this does not change according to age. This finding can be interpreted that women's body image concerns last life-long. Although there are several factors affecting negative body image of older women, there are also contradicting findings in terms of body images of older women (Peat, Peyerl, & Muehlenkamp, 2008). In earlier studies, it was observed that older women were more dissatisfied with their bodies than younger women (Fallon & Rozin, 1985; Rozin & Fallon, 1988). However, some studies demonstrated that body dissatisfaction in women does not change according to age and remains constant (Allaz et al., 1998; Stevens & Tiggemann, 1998; Tiggemann & Lynch, 2001). There are also a certain number of studies, which coincide with this study's findings, emphasizing that women's perception of body image does not change according to their ages (Pliner, Chaiken, & Flett, 1990; Tiggemann & Lynch, 2001). Besides, the number of such studies has recently increased (Webster & Tiggemann, 2003; Tiggemann, 2004; Bedford & Johnson, 2006; Pruis & Janowsky, 2010; Gagne et al., 2012).

The study revealed that eating attitudes of women also do not change according to their ages. Participant's eating attitude points were high although no pathological situation was observed. The

related literature contains different results concerning this finding, as well. Heatherton et. al. (1997) in a longitudinal study (from average age of 20 to average age of 30) found out that as their age advance, women less frequently go on a diet and their eating disorders decrease. However, Allaz et. al. (1998) stated that 42% of a group of women between ages of 30 and 74 went on a diet in the last 5 years. In addition, they indicated that 31% of the women who are over 65 years went on a diet although 62% of them have normal weight. Therefore, these findings demonstrate that women do have concerns about eating attitudes and tend go on a diet anytime although they do not have pathological eating attitudes.

Other findings of this study present that there are a positive relationship between women's subjective happiness and body image, subjective happiness and age. Therefore, findings demonstrate age; body image and eating attitudes are significant precursors of subjective happiness. It is frequently mentioned that women's body satisfaction is associated with their general satisfaction with their lives (Diener, Wolsic & Fujita, 1995; Katz & Farrow, 2000). It is assumed that the life-long happiness of women, who are not able to have socially accepted ideal body, is affected by lack of ideal weight (Stokes & Frederick-Recascino, 2003). Several studies in the literature draw attention to the significant relationship between body image and subjective well-being (Diener, Wolsic & Fujita, 1995; Katz & Farrow, 2000; Durkin & Paxton, 2002; Bedford & Johnson, 2006; Choma, Shove & Bussieri, 2009; Donaghue, 2009). However, some of these studies were done on adolescents but adult age groups were excluded. This situation is also an important limitation to body image studies. On the other hand, body image is a dynamic concept, which can be influenced from several internal or external conditions. The individual's incapacity to adopt changes concerning her body does not only show her dissatisfaction with her body but also with her life (Rocha & Terra, 2013).

Although women of advanced ages are not happy with their bodies, they might have high subjective happiness. This may seem to contradict with the fact that body image is a precursor of subjective happiness. However, this situation can be considered that although women are not satisfied with their bodies due to the advanced ages, they begin to pay less attention to their bodies, they emphasize less on appearance oriented burdens (low self-objectification) (Tiggemann, 2004), they care details less (observation of fewer bodies) and they have lower appearance anxiety. Women of older age have more cognitive control (re-evaluation and lower expectations) than younger women do. (Webster & Tiggemann, 2003). For older women, appearance is less important and they have lower tendency to meet consequences of negative body image (Clake, 2002). These gains that women acquired through advancing age, work as barriers against negativities concerning change of body. The women, who are exposed to changes stemming from old age, become dissatisfied with their bodies but they find it more acceptable. Consequently, in comparison to younger women, older women become less associated to their dissatisfaction concerning body images with their general life satisfaction. This is because, older women have more sources in their lives to be happy and they use these sources efficiently. This finding coincides with results of Peat, Peyerl, & Muehlenkamp (2008)'s research. It shows that body dissatisfaction of women lasts life-long however; its negative impact reduces with advancing age.

In the study, a low-level of negative association was found between the age and eating attitudes and eating behaviors and subjective happiness. Body dissatisfaction is an important risk factor for depression and eating disorder (Thompson et al., 1995; Shepherd & Ricciardelli, 1998; Polivy & Herman, 2002). Heatherton et. al. (1997) stated that chronic diet is a continuous problem for a great number of women. The ratio of diet among older women is still high. In accordance with these data, body image dissatisfaction is an important risk factor for eating disorders in both

adolescence and adulthood. Therefore, there is a need for longitudinal studies with several variables. Verplanken & Velsvik (2008) also mentioned that eating disorder is one of the significant results of negative body perception. On the other hand, Johnson & Wardle (2005) and Cooley & Toray (2001) showed that body image dissatisfaction is a key factor for eating disorder. As a result, body image perception remains an important issue for women during their lives. The women, who are exposed to changes stemming from old age, become dissatisfied with their bodies but they consider it more acceptable.

This study presented that findings related to the age, body image, eating attitudes and subjective happiness of women in Turkey, do not show a significant difference with the literature findings. This consequence might be arisen due to the body criticism of women is universal, largely. The research group is composed of college and high school graduates, college students and working women. With a more comprehensive group of research studies, it is possible to achieve results that are more effective. It is notable to evaluation of body image perception of non-employed and women with different educational backgrounds. Moreover, regarding the evaluation of body image in recent years, especially in the older ages, it is emphasized to take into consideration not only the image but health and qualification. The measurements with these variables are taken into account would be useful to obtain more effective results.

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