

## Short Communication

# Body Image and Self-Confidence during the Pandemic, COVID – 19 in Portuguese Adolescents

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**Abstract**

**Background:** This study has investigated 1600 adolescents, between the ages of 15 and 17, from 32 Schools in Mainland Portugal and Islands, after the isolation period, resulting from COVID-19 pandemic.

**Methods:** these adolescents were weighed and questioned through several quizzes about their body shape and self-esteem using the Rosenberg scale. After this pretest, physical exercises program was developed and applied during the course of two months with the goals of: development of strength, resistance and velocity. After this trial the previous quizzes were repeated- After-thesis.

**Results:** the data showed that the self-esteem and body satisfaction in adolescents were very low 29,8% corresponding to positive self-esteem and 21,6% to body satisfaction.

**Conclusions:** The self-esteem and corporal satisfaction got significantly better - 68,9% for positive self-esteem and 62,3% for body satisfaction. The levels of physical and motor fitness capacity rose, which influenced the results of self-esteem and body satisfaction.

**INTRODUCTION**

The term body satisfaction represents the positive appreciation that one has on itself. During the adolescent years it can influence how a personality develops, how connections with other people are formed and it can even dictate the academic accomplishments - based on the feeling of well-being that a positive body image has on teenagers. That being said it is obvious that body dissatisfaction can lead to a very poor self-esteem with inconvenient consequences [1,2].

It was already showed, in several studies, that there is a strong correlation between self-esteem and body positivity, and that these two variables represent a major role in teens development, as a person, over the years [3,4]. The feeling poor self-esteem and body dissatisfaction it's present through out the years and it can manifest in any given age, however it's more common amongst teenagers mainly because they have a huge need to please their peers, friends and love interests.

During the COVID-19 pandemic there was a rise in the number of teenagers with mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety, sleep disorders and increased levels of stress, with this rising numbers it was thought that maybe low self-esteem and body dissatisfaction could have a role in the development of these psychological disorders [5]. Mostly because studies showed that there was a significant weight gain during the lockdown caused by sedentarism and lack of healthy meals.

This issue has been a concerning theme for the World Health Organization and UNESCO. It is demanding to seek ways to understand how the pandemic may have affected teenager's body image so that we can develop strategies to help adolescents cope with the feelings of low self-esteem and find ways to overcome that problem, improving their quality of life.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The student's participation was voluntary, and a written authorization was signed by their parents or legal tutors, in the authorization sheet it was described the importance of this study and it also contained the ethics committee approval.

A total of 1600 students from 32 different schools (in mainland Portugal and Islands) took part in the study. The participant's age was between 14 and 17 years old. 924 participants were males and were 676 females. The students were weighed, the body mass index was calculated and they also answered the first quiz about how they felt about their body shape [6,7]. Later their self-esteem was evaluated using the Rosenberg scale [1].

After that some physical exercises were applied - it was called FitEscola Test and it included doing core exercises (such as crunches), running in length and in speed and doing push-ups. With these exercises we intended to measure the student's physical capacities - it was a pre-test.

The participants did these exercises twice a week, for 30

minutes in each physical education class through out the period of two months. After the two months went by FitEscola test was again applied to find out the impact of a routine physical activity in the adolescents, it was also meant to compare the difference between their endurance before and after.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Upon data checking it became noticeable that the majority of the students had very low self-esteem what lead to a deep body dissatisfaction. About 89.3% of all students had a total percentage of 29.8% self-esteem and 21.6% body satisfaction. Also, it was noticed that the body mass index was higher than it should in 72% of all participants.

After the project FitEscola [8] (pre-test) was completed it was noticed that: 64% of all students had a length running capacity below healthy standards, 20% had a good running capacity and only 16% where considered to be athletic. For the speed running capacity 72% were below healthy standards, 25% had a healthy capacity and only 3% where considered to be athletic.

Moving on to the evaluation of crunches and push up capacity levels the results showed that 25% and 36% were below a healthy capacity, 58% and 61% were considered healthy and only 17% and 3% were considered to be athletic, respectively.

Just after eighteen workout sessions, that occurred twice a week for 30 minutes for a period of two months it became clear that the young students started to have increasing levels of positive self-esteem and body satisfaction – the self-esteem rose up to 68.9% and the body satisfaction rose to 62.3%.

It is thought that these results were due to the improvement in their physical condition that was achieved with FitEscola program. Indeed, after two months the FitEscola test was done again and it showed serious improvements – for the length running 0% were above a healthy standard, 72% were in a healthy area and 28% were considered to be athletic. In the speed running test only 2% stayed below healthy levels, 85% were healthy and 15% were considered to be athletic. As for the crunches and push up results: 0% and 4% where above a normal healthy capacity, 58% and 71% where considered to be healthy and 42 % and 25% were considered to be athletic, respectively.

## CONCLUSION

With no doubt self-esteem and body satisfaction can have a large impact in teenagers' development. During the pandemic the numbers of adolescents with low self-esteem and poor body image increased a lot, mainly due to sedentarism and having more "unhealthy meals" what lead them to gain weight (and with that their body mass index also increased)

With this study it was possible to prove that regular physical exercise can help teenagers lose weight and gain strength what consequently helped improve their body satisfaction and self-esteem.

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8. CHECK THE TESTING BATTERY HERE.

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