

# OBESITY AND BODY IMAGE AMONG HIGH SCHOOL PUPILS

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Considering the increasing worldwide problem of negative body image as a result of a misled way of addressing obesity, we investigated this issue among adolescents, who, during puberty, undergo a series of important physical changes generating a highly dynamic perception of their body, and who are particularly vulnerable to messages sent and standards of appearance and attractiveness set for them by the family, friends, school, doctors, and mass media. Since the excessive concern for body mass and the lack of accurate information could lead to restrictive dietaries and other unhealthy methods of weight control and also to serious eating or mental disorders, we investigated through a questionnaire their body mass concerns, possible changes in dietary and regular exercise done in order to shape their body, their opinion towards obesity and self-evaluation of health status. Based on an evaluation of their body mass, we analysed the answers by comparing different body mass classes.

The research was conducted between 2004 and 2006. The sample was constituted by 1613 teenagers (589 boys and 1024 girls) coming from several Bucharest high schools. We measured their weight and height and we used the American scale of the BMI classification for children. The questionnaire was complex, but, according to the topic of this paper, we selected only a few relevant items.

As we expected, all the teenagers, irrespective of age, sex or body mass, acknowledge their appearance concerns; maintaining a certain weight constitutes an important component of this preoccupation with self-image. The methods of weight control are different for girls and boys: while most girls resort to dietaries, boys prefer to exercise more outside of school. Since body image is highly subjective and distorted, as regards regular self-control of weight, knowledge of the optimal weight according to height, and use of the food guides during diets, we found similar distributions by weight category: low percentages for underweight subjects and near ones for normal and overweight teens. *The aesthetic implications of obesity are more clear and important for the interviewed subjects than the medical ones; most of them consider obesity as a disease and accurately report their weight, but perceive themselves to be healthy, irrespective of their weight class.*

## INTRODUCTION

While, on medical ground, the specter of obesity gets larger and clearer, we are forced to admit that the price paid for obesity is reflected, not only in